Sulfur 38

GARY SNYDER: THE MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN: MY EVENING WITH ARTAUD AND OTHLOR

DENNIS FORMENTO: ROBERT DUNCAN, ANARCHIST PRINCE

GUSTAF SOBIN: LATE BRONZE, EARLY IRON

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SPRING 1996

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: CELLULIFORME, 1994, by Matsutani (graphite, paper mounted on canvas, vinyl relief—162 x 130 cm), courtesy of Galerie Mercuri, Paris.

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

LARRY EIGNER 1927–1996

I was given Eigner's first book "From the Sustaining Air" by either Jonathan Williams or by Robert Duncan who were admirers of it, forty years ago this year. I was very deeply moved by the book then, and I have been continually moved by Larry's poetry, and Larry's writing has been part of my growth. I have a different view of Larry than most people, I always saw him as a kind of astronaut. The space that we live in, that we take for granted, the chairs that we sit in, the porches that we stand on, the rain we listen to, are all part of a structure we live with that has a definite meaning for us, that has parameters and has dimensions, but Larry was always exploring it. It was different every time he sat on a porch from my sitting on a porch. When he saw a star up there, or blue in the sky, or when he saw a cooper hawk fly over, or when he listened to the wind through the wires, and wrote of them, he returned them to me in a different measure than I had perceived them in, and in a different structure than I had imagined and they seemed to me to be freer. It seemed to be freer, and it gave freedom to my life and brought more meaning to my life to be able to explore those commonalities that I took for granted except for the man who lived among them as one would live on a frontier.

It is a rare and great accomplishment that Eigner has made and he made it with his eyes and his ears and his nose and his taste and his touch and his smell and his muscles that were grasped together in his body as he sat in his wheelchair. Those were his organs of perception and through his poetry, he gave me the gift of them.

Thank you, Larry.

Michael McClure 2/6/96

JAYNE CORTEZ

NOW I DIG UP PATINAS

Now I dig up patinas
I chew on slit logs
I polish surfaces of cyclones
I mount bullet wounds to inspect
mutilations
I uproot the spirit of
the chemicals that make me
violate myself
I count limited resources
I view sink holes in
the atmosphere
I lubricate the batas
& provoke in all keys of
flesh & hallucinogenic gongs
the obscenities stuck to
my elbow of whistling bones
& with Olmec sculptors shrieking through
banana grove of my solitude
at 12:45 A M
& with the jaguars dropping from
my throat
& the pumice of bulldog ants rising from
my damp discharge zone of
poetic fission
& with medicinal fat of
a big time rooster
in my nose of talkative boogers
& with torn crows flying from my
brown bearded ovum of
sulfuric acid blood

& with the insects blowing from
my colon of atomic leaves
& with mescal tears of oppressed fleas
smeared on wings
of my ovarian cysts
I detonate
I nuclear react
I frenzy faces of
fascist thought
I become
Zaire River mouth
pissing on every
corrupt officer in an old
leopard skin Mobutu Sese Seku cap
I unmuzzle my
black stretched limousine lips
I say
I'm a poet
to vin rouge
vin blanc
drunk fly
corpse of a roach in a cup

GARY SNYDER

THE MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

Ceaseless wheel of lives
ceaseless wheel of lives

red sandstone;
gleaming dolomite

ceaseless wheel of lives

red sandstone and white dolomite.

Driving all night south from Reno
through cool-porched Bridgeport,
past Mono Lake's pale glow,
past tongues of obsidian flow stopped chill,
and the angled granite face
of the east Sierra front—

Ah. Here I am arrived in Bishop,
Owens Valley, called Payahu Nadu not so long ago.

Ranger Station on main street,
"I'm a traveller.
I want to know the way
to the White Mountains,
& the bristlecone pines."
She gives me maps. "Here. The trail
to the grove at timberline
where the oldest living beings
thrive on rock and air."

"—Thank you for your help."

I go to the pass, turn north,
end of day, climbing high,
find an opening where a
steep dirt side road halts.
A perch in the round dry hills,
bunchy pinyon pine boughs shade,
a view to the Last Chance range,
& make a camp.

Nearby, a rocky point.
Climb it,
passing a tidy scat-arrangement on a ledge,
stand on a dark red sandstone strata outcrop at the edge.
Ridge after ridge of dry sierra
darkening eastward into blue-black haze.

Out of the shade a voice says

"You had a bit of fame once in the city
for poems of mountains,
here it's real."

What?

"Like the lines

Walking on walking
under foot earth turns

But what do you know of what's below,
talk about earth and all that scale of time,
—what for?

Please read to me that poem."

I answer back,
"—Tonight is the night of the shooting stars,

Mirfak the brilliant star of Perseus
crosses the ridge at midnight

I'll read it then."

Who am I talking to? I think,
walk back to camp.

•

Evening breeze up from the flats
from the valleys "Salt" and "Death"—
Venus and the new moon sink in a deep blue glow
behind the Palisades to the west,
needle-clusters shirring in the wind—
listen close, the sound gets better.

Mountain ranges violet haze back fading in the east
puffs of sailing dusk-lit cloud, a big owl's
swift soft whip between the trees,
unroll the bedding, stretch out blankets on the
crunchy dry pine needles sun-warm
resinous ground.

Formations dip and strike my sleep.

.....

—A song approaching in a dream:

"Bitter ghosts that kick their own skulls like a ball
happy ghosts that stick a flower
into their old skull's empty eye—
'good and evil'
—that's another stupid dream—
for streams and mountains
clouds and glaciers,
is there ever an escape?

Erosion always wearing down;
shearing, thrusting, deep plates crumpling,

still uplifting—ice-carved cirques
dendritic endless fractal streambed riffs on hillsides

—bitter ghosts that kick their own skulls like a ball
what's it all for?"

a meteor swift and streaking
like a tossed white pebble
arcing down the sky—

the Mountain Spirit stalks there,
Old woman? white ragged hair?
in the glint of Algol, Altair, Deneb,
Sadr, Aldebaran—saying, "I came to hear—"

Awake: I read for her

The Mountain Poem.

Walking on walking,
under foot earth turns

Streams and mountains never stay the same.

Walking on walking,
under foot earth turns

Streams and mountains never stay the same.

Into earth rock dives.
As the mountains lift and open
underground out,
dust over seashell, layers of ooze,
display how it plays.

Buttresses fractured, looming,
friction only, soon to fall, each face
a heap of risks
talus slopes below
flakes weathered off the buried block,
tricked off an old pluton,
and settle somewhere, ever lower down—
gives a glimpse
of streaks and strains, warp and slide,
abraded gritty mudwash glide
where cliffs lean
to the raven-necklace sky—

Calcium spiralling shells,
no land plants then when
sands and stones flush down the
barren flanks of magma-swollen uplands
slurry to the beach,
ranges into rubble, old shores buried by debris
a lapping trough of tide flats and lagoons
lime-rich wave-wash soothing shales and silts
a thousand miles of chest-deep reef
seabottom riffled, wave-swirled, turned and tilled
by squiggly slime-swimmers many-armed,
millions of tiny different tracks
crisscrossing through the mud—

trilobite winding salt sludge,
calcite ridges, diatom babies drifting home,
swash of quartzy sand
three hundred million years
be rolling on and then

ten million years ago an ocean floor
glides like a snake beneath the continent crunching up
old seabed til it's high as alps.
Sandstone layers script of winding tracks
and limestone shines like snow
where ancient beings grow.

"When the axe-strokes stop
the silence grows deeper—"

Peaks like Buddhas at the heights
send waters streaming down
to the deep center of the turning world.

And the Mountain Spirit always wandering
hillsides fade like walls of cloud
pebbles smoothed off sloshing in the sea.
What for? Who cares?
old woman mountain hears
shifting sand
tell the wind
"nothingness is shapeliness"

Mountains will be Buddhas then.

when—bristlecone needles are green!
Scarlet penstemon
flowers are red!

Mountains feed the people too
stories from the past
of pine-nut gathering baskets quickly full
of help at grinding, carrying, healing—

Ghosts of lost landscapes
herds and flocks,
towns and clans,
great teachers from all lands
tucked in Wovoka's empty hat,
stored in Baby Krishna's mouth,
kneeling for tea
in Vimalakirti's one small room.

goose flocks
crane flocks
Lake Lahontan come again!

Walking on walking,
under foot earth turns.

The Mountain Spirit whispers back:

"All art and song
is sacred to the real.
As such."

•

Bristlecone pines live long

on the taste of carbonate,
dolomite,

spiral'd standing coiling
dead wood with the living,
four thousand years of mineral glimmer
spaced out growing in the icy airy sky
white bones under summer stars.

—the Mountain Spirit and me

like ripples of the Cambrian Sea

dance the pine tree

old arms, old limbs, twisting, twining,

scatter cones across the ground

stamp the root-foot DOWN.

and then she's gone.

Ceaseless wheel of lives
red sandstone and white dolomite.

A few more shooting stars
back to the bedroll, sleep til dawn.

(This poem parallels the Nô play "Yamamba" (Old Mountain-woman), a play of the "supernatural being" class, written in the "aged style" of "Quiet heart and distant eye.")

KEVIN KILLIAN

from ARGENTO SERIES

THE DOOR INTO DARKNESS

A hand within touching distance of the doorknob.
No light, no sound, the lintel black with absence and size.

The wristwatch that talks, "Time for your medications."
Feeling, the cold drip inside your thigh, the scent of fear.

Quiet, the set is cleared and the long spaces grow still, dark.
Bitter scent of attempted, the light, the warm hatching eggs.

Open the door, pick its hinges, flood the house with darkness.
A short burst of steam, the mailbox slot hot as his asshole,

darkness within and the field of the open human page. The
check for his pills, and a glass of water from crystal springs

tipped to his mouth: he is old now, yodeling in a sleep
indecent, cracked, his hand furtive sly yanks at a single sheet—

Pull at the tubes, throw open the black wooden door and let go.
All the world staring at him from inside his own eyes

and I'm like, the hand that takes the door by the knob, firmly,
uprooted, as once I made him come with my hand, till he

couldn't stop gasping for breath. Now he can breathe, now
he can live, now he can come, now he can write, dead in the
[dark.

INFERNO

Inferno maybe too descriptive
I lived with him for seven years
black under water, a shark on fire

Are you the patient XYZ?
who blew smoke up my ass
and fell into watery aphrodite loving me!

Rip that tube from the wall and feel me up
loving you and forcing you to wriggle a bit
a sausage on griddle, hot

Mother of tears, mother of shadows
give him a little more zip
I don't want him self-conscious
when he walks among dot dot dot

Big, bright colors like a Cibachrome painting
by Nan Goldin should she turn to oils.

I ate the seventies dancing in disco
and made the eighties this fresco experience
Now I'm impoverished, begging

for my birth mark, going on thorazine
should I turn to oils, shark under fire
or should I just say, *tattoo man, make*

me a birth mark, say it was me from the
beginning, and in thy honor I shall
do thee justice? I lived with him when he

died and I'll live when he abrades me
for he is the Saxon justice of a women's
barony, he gives me strength, to carry on

he lights up my life, disco inferno
night falls on a prodigal landscape, loving
him was never light mechanical

Mother of mercy, mother of pain
tell him for me he lives on my derma
when I pull it off gently after the chemo

He won't love me without my foreskin
tiny little snip of waxwork
only a storm toss'd frigate by Turner

Tell him there's some easy pickings
long and low the banks of the Mersey
white Jersey daisies and calla slips

creeping up the inner side of his leg
locks and curl then up to inside his anus
where I admitted the thorazine early

Mother of HIV, mother of envy, grant me
the shallow wish to be loved like a man
in the highest way, la vita nuova, in your

shallow dish I shall take to Goshen
learning the ropes inefficient way, if the
boat don't break don't fix it, miles of

ash and fire all you can see, in your throat,
your naked silver throat, a shallow boom
box, glug, it's coming through and we're

history.

ZOMBIE

Father who keeps one great yellow eye peeled for the
Boy, don't let him grow up to be that peeping Tom
With the German accent. Father of definition, let no

Glaucoma take him behind the screen of white china,
He's my little wriggling thing I eat like a jujube.
Out of your mouth you spewed me like catfish, lukewarm,

Whiskered, "hot diggety dog!" said the other children
Crowding round my genitals as though on Bonfire, but
Then coming back to school to pray, heads bowed

Father who makes this body of sense go stupid
Whenever I see you burning in that berry bush,
Keep your guard down till over your self-defense I leap.

I once did ooze, but now I'm hard, I'll become lard
If a prayerful sort. Dance class at noon, I expect
Every *Mein Herr* to take that duty, dinner at sevenish,

Little gummy green bear assails us at table with news of
Thee, soup on the left, big bowl of snapdragons floating
In the water of Thee. Dear God, as I lay dying of AIDS

I prayed to you and all your ministries nightly and daily,
And you were out in school teaching us the colors of the fag.
Dear God, let me freeze up his serious T-cells into miasma

And bring him alive in the 23rd century, I can't lose
Everything—not in 1 day. Jesus fucking Christ, I'll bring
Corpse after corpse to wash your feet with, to open a closet

With a bullet in space, sleep if you are tired, rest if
You feel trenchant. Father of HIV stop the digital maniplex,
Close your eyes, close your eyes, relax think of nothing tonight.

JACK CLARKE

SIX POEMS

THE ART-SCARRED SURFACE OF TELLURIS

"Above us only sky. . ."
—John Lennon, "Imagine"

"Prometheus renewed the cosmos by re-embroidering the world-mind."
—Dora Marsden, *The Mysteries of Christianity*

"Jim Bridger first white man into Yellowstone
thought God had flipped if this was Creation"
—Charles Olson

What if we didn't have that great yellowstone
of stuff to draw upon, feed off of, sustain by
sacrifice to, bend over backward not to feel
out of alignment with, as though it really were
there and you and everyone knew it to be so,
what if Prometheus were not the thief of fire
and knew it, that is had simply closed the circle
(is this what Aeschylus risked death to suggest?)
without which the gap opens to engorge along lines
Bataille has specified, consumption as destruction,
to let the liver kill you over guilt of being rich,
one's own Eagle (Mauss's *potatl)* taking the blame,
what if in the Moebius Universe there is no room
for anything between you and my open umbrella?

THE GATE OF HORN

"From the animal
to the man

leads back

to the god
or goddess

—I believe!"

—Charles Whittaker

"Each generation has two or three great conversational partners."
—Octavio Paz, "Iniquitous Symmetries: An Interview by Gabriel Caballero"

"Jim Jones learned at an early age that a dead animal could give him power over people."
—Michael Meiers, "Was Jonestown a CIA Medical Experiment?"

"The benevolent aspect of the lion identifies with Christ, and the malevolent with Satan. Such contrasting symbolism in one icon is very common in the art of the Middle Ages."
—John Williamson, *The Oak King, The Holly King, and the Unicorn*

Onions showed how horns and hair (Samson's strength)
once were outcroppings of the brain, itself a glob
of seminal fluid at the top of the spine venerated
so to be worn like antlers, how the Fabled Unicorn
might be lured to naked virginal lap of Artemis,
La Luna "stands" the Gold Green Lion of the forest
and what I took to be a hill of sheep was really
the back of a shorn Unicorn, the Whole Thing is
moving to the quiver I stepped on that morning but
now with Reilly here my fear passes over to Gramma
relieved of her congestion in canopied enclosure,
I will give Freud that much, he held a generation on
his knee knowing in these matters, an horned Moses
led him down surely, surrounded by ancient animals.

MAY POLE RAMP

"With the coming of the horse to the Great Plains in the years following the Pueblo Revolt against the Spanish (1690) matters changed."
—Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography*

"And why is it that the traditional 'Jolly Roger' pirate flag. . .you know, the skull and crossbones. . .looks so damnably identical to the skull and crossbones on Freemason gravestones?"
—Michael Bradley, *Holy Grail Across the Atlantic*

"Things are getting worse, but people are getting better."
—Arthur Young, designer of the Bell helicopter

And why shouldn't everyone be the same as their Nation,
isn't that in the best of the great Athenian tradition?
especially now when every citizen's cryptic emergency
takes place on the record, more likely phonograph than
Hall of Fame, which doesn't touch them where they live,
in song, even the President in his own wet noodle gets
behind the oval office flag no secret Skull and Bones
except to fly Death out of the Country skinned alive
in the interest of Masonic conquest, if only
the resident psychopathy could be extracted to aegis
this equine covenant and love and war loosed upon us
by satellite next to the movie channel which believes
in neither so beams a simulated mantle for all those
who die daily that MTV may broadcast rock upon rock.

THE NEW HORSE MEDICINE DREAMERS

"Far away from these threads through the hole to continue
the prospect beyond impact of landing very hard and fast
and past the anima button."

—Fred Wah, "Dead in My Tracks" (Aug. 1, 1989)

"Let's throw the Antithetical off the horse!"

—Robert Duncan, dream dictation to John Clarke

"iron workers

—Örebru

"Feathers
in her blood"

—Charles Olson, "The winds / which blew my daughter. . ."

"The wind does not move on
to another place"

—Robin Blaser, "The Literalist"

Just so you see that all we've lost has gone
elsewhere to meet us, *from feathers to iron,*
the correlate of consciousness as we go along,
twin formation now everyone is full of holes
once were thrown into by Our Father spring
was just around the corner and now the corner
is forever turned and the horses will look up
from the water when they see we have returned,
O I want us to be there (as we are), how ugly
the cut members look separated from the body,
fingers of no hand easily become Donner soup,
got to get back, poetry threads the eyes rolling
back in late Jurassic, heads still re-entrantly
connected with every other continuous cross wind.

A POET'S JOB IS TO ACT OUT

—for Al Glover

"your body
is to drop
its load"

—Charles Olson, "The nation / is nothing but poetry. . ."

"Very few indeed have stayed out all night once in their lives."

—Thoreau, *Walden*

"We need not much mind what people please to say, but what they must say."

—Emerson

"The more perfection anything has, the more active and the less passive it is. . . . The more active it is, the more perfect it becomes."

—Spinoza, *Ethics*

The secret is passed from girl to girl, and must be,
so what's a man to do but act out if and when he can?
out of the bear-sack or character armor or whatever
we want to call the thing that keeps him from being
"conspicuous and political" as Charles Olson *was* one
night at Wheeler Hall, UC Berkeley, 1965 (listen to
the tape) when he lost all his friends who had come
to hear him "read" not witness the shedding of what
he referred to as the violence of his repressions and
for once in his life really go for it, I myself have
been out only a few times and never in public without
music except the bad end of that night at Goddard 1975
when the "Get Free Institute," as the cop called it was
run our of town, all the way to Gloucester the back way.

BURNT NORTON

—for Susan Howe

"Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness."

—T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets

"Did they ever get Mahood to speak! It seems to me not. I think Murphy spoke now and then, the others too perhaps, I don't remember, but it was clumsily done, you could see the ventriloquist. And now I feel it's about to begin. They must consider me sufficiently stupefied, with all their balls about being and existing. Yes, now that I've forgotten who Worm is, where he is, what he's like, I'll begin to be he. Anything rather than these college quips. Quick, a place. With no way in, no way out, a safe place. Not like Eden. And Worm inside."

—Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (1958)

"not subject the I is
the bread the light the door
the way the shepherd the vine"

—Susan Howe, "Nether John and John Harbinger"

"We are conducting an investigation of the condition of proper nouns thru creation."

—Charles Olson, *Last Lectures*

Proper name by being phenomenological contains
the very "I am that I shall be" bookends of life
we're always looking for, imagine everything as
Novalis becoming itself to know that sweetness *is*
sweeter by your name, your help, your standing in
for consciousness, it is a bold project (Fichte's
not Jaynes) reading with Creeley, "oh Rose thou art
not sick" (Buffalo, 1974) of the world / twist, hers and
the Worms in perpetual enharmonic allegory forever
resisted out of topological confusion with the girl

next door, for whom all wait, as the red wheelbarrow
already there, which is what the Novices at Sais
found hunting among rocks who refuted John Locke
on behalf of the secondary qualities that *never* spoke.

The Black Bird Press
250 N. Goodman Street
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Riding First Car

Poetry by Milton Kessler
Etchings by Robert Marx

The poem is a composition in 41 parts. The 10 etchings are handprinted, numbered and signed by the artist. Each of the 50 portfolios is enclosed in a 15x11 blue cloth slipcase and is priced at $850.

T.J. ANDERSON III

IF I GET THE NAME RIGHT

fungiform on my tooth barrier
how to name you
when your smoke
is language's laminar flow

but my chicken thigh jaws
launch a spasm outside this atrium
I'm the actor here
be barbecue sauce drip
a stillborn snake in ribgrass

Drawer, I've seen your sand figures
and frankly they stink
but not in the way you
think I mean it
I bring this up:
moon catapulter of sex
on a balcony overlooking the Lualaba
Understand it's beautiful this time of year
what with the aroma of camellias imported
pungent in Spring air

Then the image splint collapsed
atrophied like a glow-worm armada
suspended pearls in a tree
where the fragment throttles the beacon
heavy steps are poised to collide

but, that's not the blood I want here

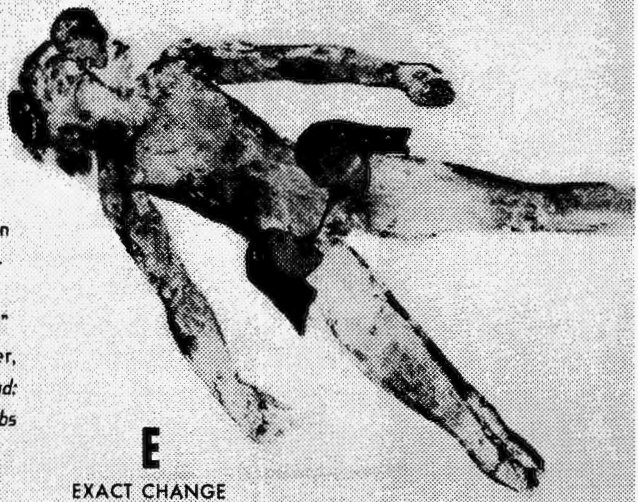
corpuscle explosion
sizzle the frying pan on my ear

moon that is your face
crater spasm a tongue that makes
no directional stab
Where does dream start
when the Loa divide
and dictate their separate dancing?

WATCHFIENDS & RACK SCREAMS:
Works from The Final Period by ANTONIN ARTAUD

Translated by
Clayton Eshleman
with Bernard Bador

"Clayton Eshleman's translations are the finest and most authentic which have yet been made from Artaud's writings . . . This collection has been wisely selected and magnificently realized. Artaud is being taken into the twenty-first century."
— Stephen Barber,
author of *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*



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WILL ALEXANDER

WITHIN THE ORACULAR SEA HORSE MIRROR

Immersed
in this verdurous galaxy of salt
in this necrotic intaglio of wind
blown by the visual wheels of the abyss
I see the sea horse in this stormy optical dice
blinding the backs of shrewish winter eels
adding & subtracting its coffins
in this special floating foci mirror

with its pressures inveigled
like a holographic mescal
like a powerful Hottentot bionics
wavering at the core of a splendiferous practical amber

its images practicing drills
in a gigantic ambrosian leper field
gazing beyond a zone
of illusive inward metals
beyond a listless fertilization
blind
with dense gametophytes

it is like reading
with a smouldering interfixation
a treatise on locomotion
within the flames of a boldly colored anti-sun
essential in its depths
in its risings
to its bony lattice work of lightning
a-lighting

this spinning sea horse vacuum
"at right angles to the body"

it is Syngnathidae
with its dorsal fin in motion
with its "50 rectangular bony plates"
its occluded percentiles
ironically burning
at the peak of a minute ingestion

then the swarming from the masculine ventral pouch
of fiery new born lanterns
of the fires of "50 species"
into new pre-fibular colonies
into wretched bodily wards of fire

because
in this crow-like speculum of nerves
there exists the power of an arcane heliotrope
of a virgin profanation
of a deep & protrusive transparency
so that
in its slow motion movement
I see
in every fleck of carnivorous transparency
in every subaqueous star
the primeval rage
of an ocular underwater eagle

like a vertical rotation
like a flight of mineral in negative rococo
its elevations plunging downward
into dense barometers of squid
in the total waters of the sun
diffused
in a magic fumarole of rays
as a rhythm of squalls
in runic crystal optics
with vision translated

from a wild biology of corpses

the sea horse
with its primal rotating sugars
with its global turpentine advances
dissolving
& leaving the eye
in optical polarization
minus the mineralogy of the deluge
with its explosive facial chemistry
with its explosive facial compounds
pre-existing in a gust of bells
living by visibility & lava

I see
"dissymmetry of molecular" combining
I see
blurred geometrical dalliance
electrically cancelled at the poles
of the "two types of crystals"
of "sodium ammonium nitrate"
with this fish horse of doubled rotations
seeking to refract
the quantum memory of osmosis
within the low inductive medium of the sea

in this mesmeric index by wave
by lethal ingestion by acid
the sea horse weaves its talons
within a rock of shaken nightmare phonemes
within the glance of diving bludgeoner's owls

so what I see
entangles the region
in an angular digestion of jewels
in a biogenic spiral of coral

because
Syngnatidae

with its turning kilowatts of zinc
with its slow motion access to greater arcs & seizures
with its nutrients of flight linked to strange subduction prairies
stilled
in their first Pre-Cambrian volume
with the power of water
fused
in its magic Benguela current
in its Agulhas movement
blowing across Fuamoto Ridge
across the Atlantic-Indian basin
like a silent wolf
within a swarm of operas

Syngnathidae
in the virile state
of its haunted stationary resource
with its blending of coal & brightness
with its ammonia by diversity
it triggers litres in my system
in my enormous cyclical fury
cyclonic
with a passion
for declination & explosion

ROBERTO TEJADA

MIGUEL VENTURA

With a significant body of work, some of it dating back to the late-1970s when he first established himself in Mexico City, artist Miguel Ventura (San Antonio, Texas, 1954) has been exposing the underside of empowered imaginations and their sinister world views in which the body and language disintegrate as stable boundaries of the self.

In his 1990 series of drawings entitled *New Monuments to the Enemies Within*, and especially his 1991 exhibition of large-format oil paintings with an accompanying text entitled *Cat Club Memoirs: Life Questions in Keeping with the Psychological Interests of the Master Race*, Ventura crammed his surfaces, in a wresting amalgam of text and image, with violent, lower-body hallucinations—a veritable surgico-sexual cataclysm or police-state field day as performed by the proto-Nazi youth of Robert Musil's *Young Törless*, in its over-the-top comic-strip version.

Ventura's rough-cut figurative style of that period is a kind of Die Brücke expressionism turned inside out—devoid of its phosphorescent palette in favor of grittier tones, informed by paraphernalia of the Third Reich, yet continually undermined by the visual grammar of the animated cartoon. In these hyperkinetic canvases, balding boy-men of variable proportions, part android, part meat-puppet, are contorted into crowded tableaux, decked in their uniform of green shorts, white shirts, suspenders, neckties, black round-rimmed glasses and an occasional school cap.

In a free-floating field of columns, diminutive urban ruins, severed heads and limbs, bare light bulbs and sundry emblems of violence—crosses and swastikas, but also knives and revolvers—one canvas depicts a bandaged and emaciated nurse breastfeeding a few of the boy-men figures by means of cathodes and intravenous tubes, while a few of the latter have proceeded to whip out erect cocks from their trouser-shorts, masturbating oblivious to, or on account of, the general havoc.

Random phrases from the writings that frame the panels of a quasi-crucifixion triptych manage to evoke a hybrid discourse fused between the smutty imaginings of public-bathroom graffiti, the private deliriums of persecution and the icy newspeak of instruction manuals: "AN ORGASM ON THE EVE OF A BABY'S BIRTH CAN TRIGGER THE ONSET OF LABOR (. . .) I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT

SOMEONE HAS AN INTEREST IN ROBBING ME OF MY HEALTH AND IS PROFITING FROM MY HEALTH." Or elsewhere: "POKE YOUR EYES OUT AND EAT OUT YOUR FINGERNAILS AND CLOSE YOUR EYES WHILE SOLDIERS FUCK YOUR SISTER IN THE PLAYGROUND. MEANWHILE YOUR DICK GETS SO HARD YOU ROLL OVER AND GET YOUR ASS FUCKED BY A BIG FAT NAKED DOG, BUT DON'T LET DOGS SUCK YOUR DICK, IT MIGHT FEEL GOOD BUT NO."

As they seek to dynamite the totalitarian nature of all hygienic discourse, these untitled paintings are chain-link compositional retables that stage the ultimate pornocracy of power—both the tyrannical fantasies out of which it arises and those, by turns, it is capable of re-animating.

Before moving to New York in 1992, Ventura produced a variegated, transitional series of canvases and works on paper that helped shape the course of his subsequent and present endeavors. Paring down his visual vocabulary by favoring smaller formats, and employing translucent scrims or kitschy pre-patterned fabrics like gingham and florals in place of canvas, many of those works focus almost entirely on bits of telegraphic or mutilated text, a miscellany of English, Spanish, German or Cantonese transcription, treating it as a "decorative" component, regardless of how obscure or disconcerting its content. Others feature lifeless or fiendish-looking faces of men, women and children in straight-on frontal renderings; the names of stimulants, depressants and tranquilizers inscribed in floating sausage-capsules; scraps of hard-core pornography or the chess-board background formed by pages torn from handbooks.

The anonymous head-shots, the mass-produced design of the supporting cloth, the pharmacology of everyday life, and the seemingly-random though extremely-operative nature of language as employed by publicity or power... together, the part and parcel of these works address the flagrant code of authority by which overdeveloped social interaction has become increasingly regulated. [Elias Canetti: "God made a mistake in his calculations at the Tower of Babel: nowadays everybody speaks the same technology."]

A dual fear of non-uniformity and sameness is disclosed and intensified by Ventura in his recent project, a series of installations and an artists' book entitled *The Notebooks of Mademoiselle Heidi Schreber.* Using Daniel Paul Schreber's case history *Memoirs of My Nervous Disorder* as a point of departure, and establishing a mock organization called the New Interterritorial Language Committee as an eerie underpinning, Ventura has created a terrifying artifact that is the compendium of a mind's self-image in the process of deterioration, its myriad voices spewing out the raw sexual relishings and vehement doggerel of an ersatz, worldwide anti-assimilationist vigilante group. [The book, incidentally—in a babel of German, Spanish, English, Chinese, Arabic and Swahili—concludes with three appendices: an additional vocabulary in Chinese, a sizable list of medications and a complete translation of all texts into both Spanish or English.]

While its translucent paper jacket and cream-colored wrappers endow the book with the aura of a harmless primer, the progressive depictions of a face undergoing multiple and seemingly-endless transformations—a true automatism of repetition—seem more like asylum renderings of *Mad* magazine's cover nerd, both in and out of drag. The violent facial morphing includes a variety of gender-graftings or tongues and protuberances in arabesques as they ramrod in and out of ears, nostrils and eye sockets, or become sinewy veins of intestinal lettering that spell out Artaudian rants ("ancestral / mountaintop / -isms! / graves / medulloblastomas / purities / praises / plexalgia / lithopaedions") or three-word slogans ("therapies / thrones / cattle; eggs / axes / maids"). The accompanying polyglot text throughout becomes a ceaseless assault on fixity and its self-contradictory phobia of all things hybrid—namely sex, species and language:

> *"Where are you, little mongrel rascals?"*
> Do not allow these verminous creatures
> to hide underneath their social tricks and
> disguises! (. . .) Allow the
> bastardized elements to perish through
> quick assimilation, therefore annihilation! (. . .)
> Remember that the new
> integrationist tactics as proposed for new youth
> in the newer world sphere by the
> New Interterritorial Language Committee
> allows for greater harmony and coexistence
> between the bastardized hybrid elements and the
> pure elements of this new republic!"

The invented personas organized around one Heidi Schreber, herself in continual transformation, speak the decay of eternal displacement, the self-effacing prospect of the new ghetto-State and its regulating Laws as envisioned by the artist. In a relentless dissection whereby psychotic images of the individual mind serve as nightmarish analogies of the social, Miguel Ventura has constructed a disturbing psycho-cyberspace metaphor that seems to allude however to our present-day laxity with regard to a new fear and loathing in the so-called "post-ideological order": a sleep of reason whose monsters include the present menace of worldwide cultural homogeneity, an exploding violence perpetuated in the name of "collective identities," and a sort of general schizophrenia between the artificially simulated and the painfully real...

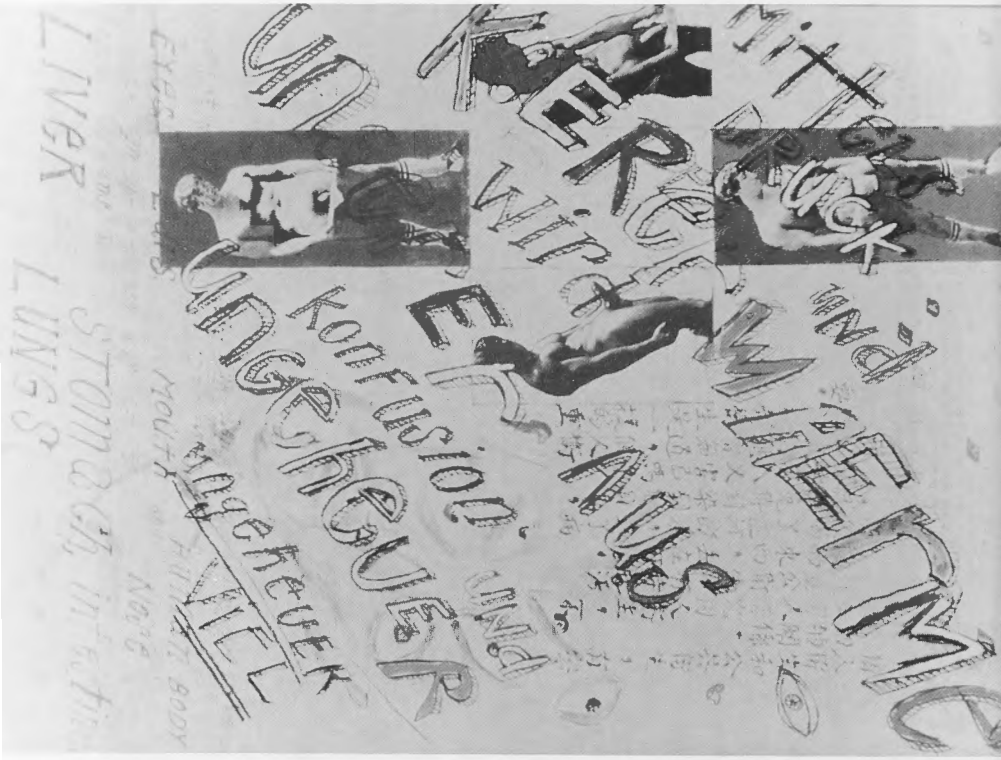
Whoever advocates
the simplification

of the languages is considered an enemy!
Whoever tries to stand still
in this transformation goes
against Nature!

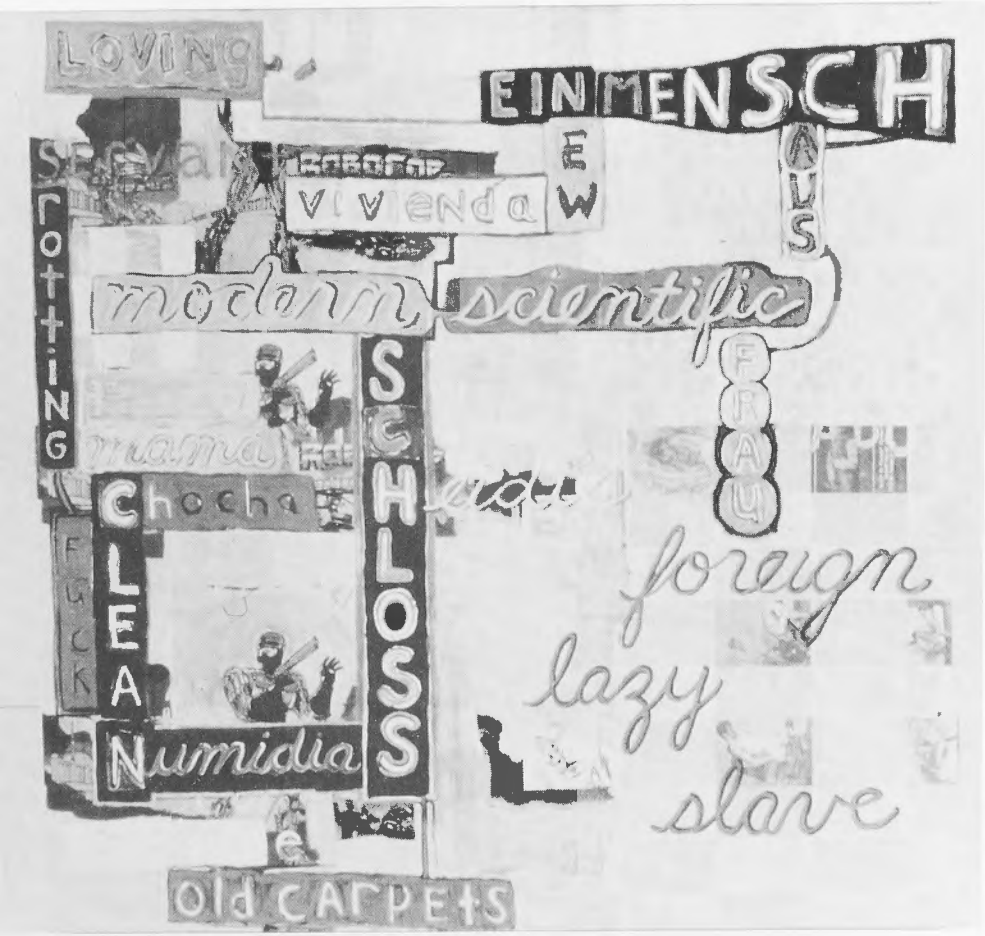
MIGUEL VENTURA

SIX WORKS

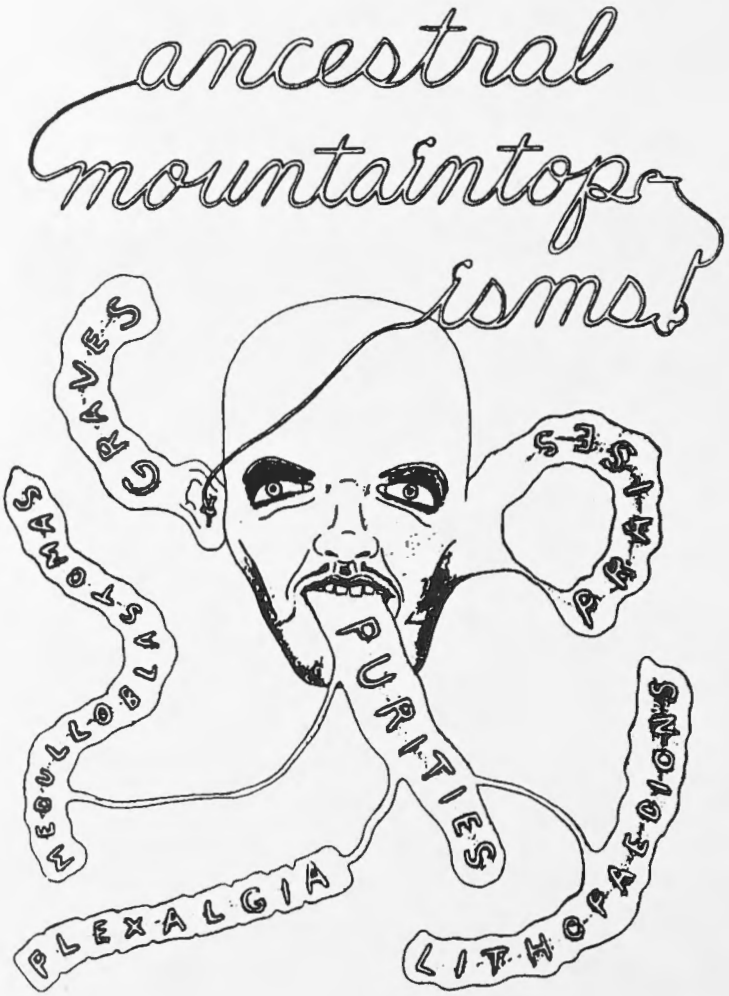
Untitled
1990, oil/canvas, 200 x 255 cm



Untitled
1992, mixed media/paper, 76 x 56 cm



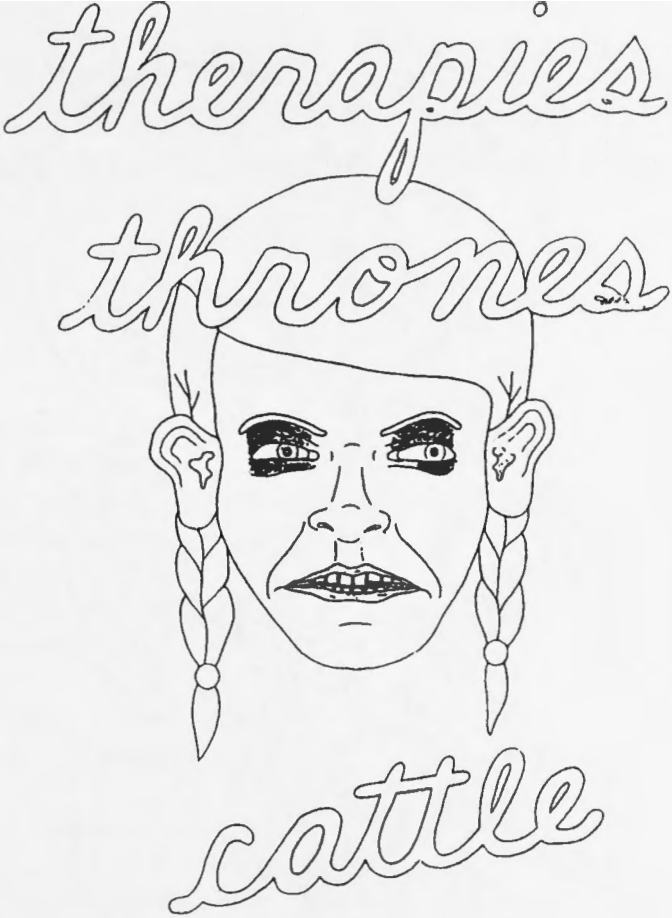
Untitled
1993, oil/canvas, 2 x 2 m



Dieses neue Ghetto muß dabei von der Voraussetzung ausgehen,
daß ein zwar wissenschaftlich wenig gebildeter,
aber körperlich gesunder Mensch mit gutem, festem Charakter,
erfüllt von Entschlußfreudigkeit und Willenskraft,
für die Volksgemeinschaft wertvoller ist als ein geistreicher Schwächling.

(This new ghetto must proceed from the assumption that a man of little scientific education but physically healthy, with a good, firm character, imbued with the joy of determination and willpower, is more valuable for the national community than a clever weakling.)

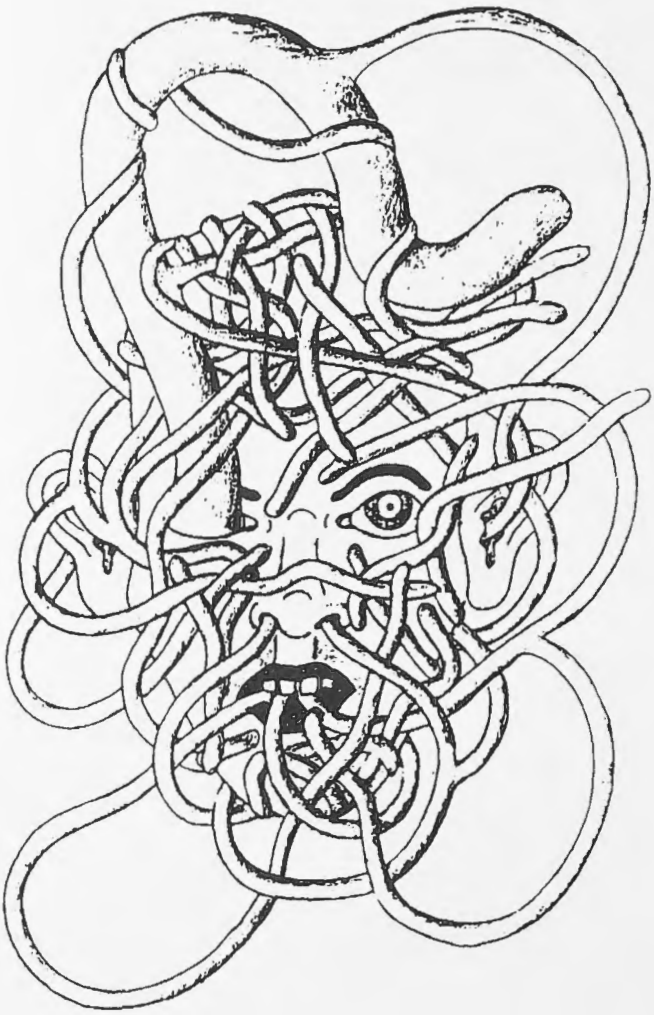
from **The Notebooks of Mademoiselle Heidi Schreber**
NILC, Mexico City, 1995, p. 18



妨並加衰嫁娶婚
既且志紀礙妻俗

oppose	together	to add	decay: weak	to marry a husband	to take a wife	marriage
since, when	moreover	will, purpose	record	to hinder	wife	vulgar

from **The Notebooks of Mademoiselle Heidi Schreber**
NILC, Mexico City, 1995, p. 35



Mwanangu nataka ujifanye bubu! Mtoto akakubali!
Mama yake akamchukua akampeleka mpaka kwa mganga,
akamwambia, Nimekuletea mwanafunzi!
Akamwuliza, Huyu mtoto bubu? Akanena, Bubu tangu kuzaliwa!
Akamwambia, Unaona, hivyo ndivyo nilivyotaka!

("My child, I want you to pretend to be dumb!" The child agreed! His mother took him off to the doctor and said to him: "I have brought you a pupil!" And he asked her: "Is this child dumb?" She replied: "Dumb from birth!" He said to her: "You realize that this is exactly what I desire!")

from **The Notebooks of Mademoiselle Heidi Schreber**
NILC, Mexico City, 1995, p. 75

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

MY EVENING WITH ARTAUD AND OTHLOR

While I never met Antonin Artaud, I did witness his performance, while in the wings, at the Vieux-Colombier, in Paris, 1947. I was eleven, and after a decision that collided with all her past behavior, my mother laid in a sizable supply of salami for my father, buttoned him in bed, and we took off, two naïfs from Indianapolis, to bear witness to what my mother's choirmaster promised would be
the overturning of the cross,
or,
the planted body sprouting
through the bulb of its own barrier.

We slipped into the hall, stubs in hand, past Gide, Paulhan, Marthe Robert, a young Paule Thévenin, and others I have come to know through the lexical corpses littering the writing of my second magician (Blackstone, at the Circle Theatre the year before, being my first). Shortly after our complicated return, my mother completed the trinity of my early initiations by taking me to see *Tarzan's Desert Mystery,* my introduction to caves and spiders.

What moved me so much about my mother's behavior:
she did not yet know that I was born!
How close we were in those days!

While Artaud stripped, I thought of my sex life with my mother. The most moving months had been inside her, and while there were gaps in my fetal memory, what happened there, as I gesticulated to her every thrust, recalled my own closed-eye vision which I began to practice at eight. Pressing my knuckles into my closed eyelids, I manufactured stars, lagoons, lace stockings, blasted cities and kaleidoscopic diamonds which, watching Artaud, struck me as

arterial beholdings, or seeings into my own seams which were, in effect, those of my mother.

The fact that we merge into the egg, as a zero or gleam, to then remain bouncifully suspended there in a solitary confinement that is the least solitary we will ever know—this seems to suggest something about the unhappiness of men, who emerge hypnotized by an infolding warmth for which they will search throughout their lives but never rediscover—not in philosophy, nor in bathing.

Women while pregnant return to the womb, in men's eyes, and even if never pregnant, appreciate a "summer's full" in a way that men brood about or rapinely chafe against. Womb life, that vague memory of being coated with a pond that goes out into infinity, this memory, bachelored by the awareness that it almost certainly cannot be recontacted, this drives men to fury! We suppose that dogs do not see their death, but men do, without the certainty that it is final or the mitigation of a new life starting up inside.

Sitting by my mother, as she kept squeezing my hand, reminding me of a frightened female mole pursued by an aroused male, and watching Artaud divest himself of everything—sitting by one who would burrow into me, while watching this fetal dance, man in the glade of himself, a kind of pinhead deprived of sunlight—my thoughts desubordinated fugally.

It was amazing to be by the one who made me, who took another's gleam seriously, while watching, right before my eyes, what life had in store for me. Artaud's bat-like reclutching, the way his "mutual aid" clothes failed to fit (though seemed, like a tree after a storm, perfectly right), his acrobatic introspections speared in mid-flight, the lullaby always about to emerge that, upon croon, swerved into loon-like wailing, then shot straight up to golden-shower the crowd while, at the same time, he was more arachnoid than anyone, more packed with eaten heads, more guilty—

this display made me feel that Artaud had at long last gone beyond his stymied Theatre of Cruelty, that this evening we were witness to the first performance of

an Amniotic Theater.

Artaud's complaint seemed to palpitate a disappearance. And it was: man reaches a limit of contraction at birth from which he seldom

recovers. I whispered this to Gladys as she dug at my palm and, card that she was, she whispered back:

"Why you old fox! Go on, go on!"

Man is in contraction at birth because not only the essential, but the armature of the essential, and its ruthless anatomical aftermath, have been determined. At birth, man's invisibility is greater than his visibility, for he has been stiffed of eternity by those two sphinxes who made his manifestation possible. Some find profundity in the egg. Artaud was appalled by it. He once wrote that "the EGG state is the anti-Artaud state *par excellence.*"

It seemed that we stayed in these wings for many years. It seems that Artaud, ravaged and enraged, hands flying like birds around his face, declaimed his scarcely-audible poems throughout my adolescence, and that during this period I remained in the wings, watching the poet, then the audience, motionless by my mother, who occupied herself with needlework, occasionally asking me to play "White Christmas," "Rustle of Spring," or Chopin's "Revolutionary Etude."

Artaud would strip down to nothing, lose his skeleton in a wild flurry of looking, become two sockets bouncing about on the stage, then joint by joint reappear, throw on his black rags, grab his manuscripts, and start to howl again.

Bud Powell visited, as did Lennie Tristano. The audience left, then returned, the auditorium filled with snow, sand blew in from Morocco. What are we doing here, I would ask mother.

Then she would hand me the Bible that Reverend Ragan had inscribed to me. As if suddenly plunged back into an asylum, Artaud would stop, twitch, and glare. His consternation told me that I must create my own Bible or be enslaved by another man's.

In a pale imitation of the soul, I would get dressed, first slipping on my pajama pants, then my wool suit pants. This way I wouldn't scratch so much in the pew that I would disturb the trances of those nearby.

In a pale imitation of the soul. All seemed to seem, even Artaud, even when he grabbed his crotch while cartwheeling around it, yelling that mommy-daddy was the monstrous absence in presence.

The monstrous absence in presence, a fugal occlusion, the dead fish in hand feeling of one's most treasured erection. The way life winks through every rigid expression. One seeks a rudder in all of

this, a broom handle bobbing in the whirlpool, anything that smacks of being moored. Moored to what? Mother's smile?

"The basis of pornography," my mother leaned over to me, "is the impersonality in generation."

Artaud was taking a break, and Gide, who had fluttered to the ceiling of the Vieux-Colombier, had just descended, billing and cooing about Antonin's shoulders.

"Frankly, I'm appalled by it," she continued, "but I had to realize that my Chicago choirmaster, who came on to me before you, had a keener contour than daddy did that night in 1934, Philadelphia to be exact, when he slid into me as if I had walked into a hurricane. I buried my feelings in an entry in my Wannamaker Diary, commenting on a car accident, but you, my sweet sailor, became the curl of that lunge, and in many ways you are as impersonal as personal."

You are very naughty, I told mother—such information is pornography itself. Besides, it was truly revolutionary in 18th century France, and is still hardly the cleavage you just displayed.

"Listen," mother buried, "solidarity is our only hope. There are midnights as pristine as Keats' nightingale, and others so jagged only a Shakespeare could bevel them. Cock in cunt, pardon me, my son, is celebrated not only in the English copula but is rampant in the metaphorical underworld. It is our lie, our magnificent nonsense. Humankind can only stand so much fucking. Us Hoosiers understand TS Eliot's wisdom thus: piston in groove, oiled in and out, ongoing, for thirty minutes, to funeral parlor fusion, is simply too close to the void that, as your dear mother, I have brought you here to witness. And it is the void that terrifies us Christians, for we have no place to put it, no tequila and marigold bridge by which to cross the cross. The crucified is obviously stuck there and unable to assist. If Mary Magdalene were truly Magdalenian, surely she would have dragged him, cross and all, into the cave and succored him. And if they crucify me for our conversation—"

(mother turned to me like a dead, drowned dog)

"—would you roll away the rock?"

Frankly, I was furiously scribbling, and had almost tabled my dear mother's plea. Gide and Artaud were entwined on the dais, the audience was out smoking and quaffing. As a mortified eleven-year-

old, I decided it was time to confront eating pussy. Simply having been down there, between Vala's legs, peering up across her tummy and crossed eyes, had offered me a brief but untutored perspective on male and female relationships. I had felt subordinate for the first time—and indeed, wife I was to Vala's barely-haired timid slit. We had been in the rumble seat of paradise, a May Saturday afternoon, the orchestra of hell thrumming through our mettle. It's V for me, I recalled murmuring, lick to jolt.

Mother saw the blaze in my furrow, held a match to me, then lit up, incandescent.

"I could never get daddy to pray. I aligned him, perfumed my nest, even set up a mirror system by which, were he to roll over, he could reflect on the nature of the void. Prayer as cunnilingus, humbling and potent—only a maven could find a beat in it capable of tripping his own heart's arrogance. The man who scarfs his lunch from the trough of the goddess—this is the way we used to put it in Wabash—is injured in the act; he will never replay the hero, and who, dear son, is a hero after Odysseus? Men adore sexual mobility, parading full orchestras across the body of one passive, but to face this fateful gate, this Song of Songs, is to know the pump runs dry, and that the sacred is as much a scab as a mountain."

"I love to be broken down into the conversation we are having," mother continued. "If Antonin and André could fully explore, I'd like to think they would happily include the character of each as well as the void. This is where the lower body comes in, as a teaching device. The upper body, that palace of enforced certainty, is a battered though beloved icon. I love you most totally thinking of you as a cigar boy, just a torso and saucy head, no inquiring hands. If I had my way, I'd keep you like a jumping bean on the fireplace mantle forever. But since we are all products of each other's imaginations, I am quite aware of your serpent tail—such will not get you a MacArthur, but because you scuttle where you bleed, there are those in the future who will think of you, momentarily, as they pray..."

Her voice seemed to trail. Artaud was back, Gide in the audience. A poisoned stillness reigned. I realized that Artaud had not lived as he felt he should live until he died in electroshock, and that the first

half of his writing life had been one long complaint that he was dead—

then the beauty and the dreadfulness of the poetic act broke across me. All poets, I premised, seek to be born in their work, and if we take that nothing backwards, then one begins as a deadman, and the deadman, even if regeneration occurs, is always there, a mummy or mommy-mummer, in the crease of realization. So that the poet is dead to but alive for reality and alive for a mouthless speaking, through which death, voiced, enlivens us. The poet is the dale through which countless copulations have passed, a sorghum of matted bee deaths, in hive to a flowering only those who suck at the source feel like hooraying. And then it struck me that everything I had just said could be stood on its head, because if one thing is true about life, its opposite is also true. Yes, the poet is the one who sucks at the vulvic, penile, or anal source, but the poet is also the one who refuses, and enaltars the consummation. Then a beautiful light spoke: Bodhisattva, stay with the peak.

Artaud was back in zoom, I felt like a flit, and mother? Tired as we all were, she moved on, slipping into the prompter box before Artaud's feet.

It was in this box, that in 1970, I buried her vertically. I was thirty-five, and have had many years to reflect on our fantastic evening at Vieux-Colombier.

*

"Concerning your jumping bean status," my mother continued
—listen, I said, you are not my mother,
you are the interior mommy who ages as the speaker,
a figure called mutha, or mutho, or othlor,
a lobbying for terrain in my early adolescence
"—you listen," Gladys spat,
"I didn't holeschool you on Artaud for limbo!
Don't you see, Clayton Junior, we have you coming and going,
you were of me—bounced out, there I was again.
Male life is confined to square one,
call it a keep or square it with Jung.
It is time we laid out your savior here,
that you put your savior on..."

This conversation with one's mom puts jism into Jesus,
it weights poetry's resurrection—
give Jesus some jism so he can spurt off the cross,
recon his image, remember him as virile and ordered,
capable of error, think of him as an army dog
who saves wounded soldiers, the real hero of your Sunday
School fantasies...

At Lascaux,
death was a fetal bundle nourished by red clay.
The difficulty was in determining a non-center.
Center was everywhere,
spark chipped menstrual moon embedded spear—
Life too, at Lascaux, was overwhelmingly centric.
The challenge: invent periphery.
Periphery is the Artaud core, the soul
that seeks and contests all limits,
circumference as inhabited by Dickinson,
to bear, around, to be, on the southside of
the northside of, organ
as what one evolves out of,
mind as an extension of Othlor's Web

Thus the Minotaur is the interior alienate;
any artist's shadow,
he is only to be invaded and ploughed under.
Those who worship at center,
betray the companion for the maze.

None of this was planned, not a word set in forecast,
all of it, one calligraphic stroke—
but last night, at fifty-nine, and at 4 AM,
I woke to an ending that the boy at eleven could not
have caught:
the stage of the Vieux-Colombier shifting fog,
the curtains crumbling, billowing grit,
and the audience? looked like Emily's gazing grain.
I saw what looked like goal posts outside the Rodez asylum,
felt the excrement in excrescence,

the extent to which incarnation is incarceration,
then I saw the white recluse
hammering out her diadem,
the infantile and the anile
in placental clasp—

Poetry in attempting to go beyond itself
nearly always reties its elf to a lumbering coffin mouse,
not that the circle comes full (choking
on its plenum),
but that fetal eyes peep from funeral bouquets.
Facing a plan (really, a vision as to how
to end this poem),
I understood the charge of poetry is to be alert
over and under the whorl, to contact the shark
and travel as its pilot.

Now I saw Artaud as a brown recluse flexing on a hammock,
masturbating sperm into its catch,
then with boxing-glove paps
inducting the sperm, as one might fill a fountain-pen.
Loaded, the Artaud recluse went off to seek his othlor.
"I do not want to eat my poem,
but I want to give my heart to my poem"
—not bad for one under electroshock in 1944 Europe.
This refusal to eat, this necessity to give,
is dualistic, and ruthless if carried through
(Romantic Artaud
injected with the heroin of Gnosticism,
Artaud a crab louse on Wordsworth's right ball,
insistent on crab louse rights, for which read:
crab louse vision,
the heartless crabic pissing on all limits,
the point: to bore, and in fusion reject all bounding
fusions.
My task is to imagine Artaud's
ascent,
drawing up his lower body into a leggy packet,
so that his toothless, fang-shaped head is surrounded

only by legs—his walking tree of will, without organs—
an eight-legged head bearing its sperm-swollen paps.

If every road the poet assumes is a via
whose depth is death—then what chance for Artaud—
as he prepares to sink into his othlor?

The Artaud Recluse, bearing boxing-glove masses of sperm
up into The Milky Othlor, crawling the Great Rift,
passing over the Coalsack of the Crux,
thrumming on the Ophelia vent, pushing into the caul,
retrieving his fetus, burning his fetal toxin,
pummeling self-purged semen into sidereal Sunyata.

[February, September, 1995;
January, 1996]

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

THE INEVITABLE FLOW OF MATERIAL THINGS THROUGH THE PORES OF THE YEARS

Bleached
to the point of
subordination
blasted
stochastically
in the increase
of manners taken to
calling
COMMENCED BLAZON
surreptitiously trips
resolute
tourniquet
guiding the lackadaisical
flurry
(improvisatory hindsight)
chugging
bean-bag apocalypse
interlineated upon
systematic
(or did she say systemwide?)
malfeasance
gumping up the
animation emulator
not a minute before
toking on toxic
thought detectors
tossed together with
targeted segments
of remorse, the
motive for infinitesimally

orgasmic
liquid labors, clutched
ordinances dancing on
head of a
whining for
Mercurial acrobatics, phonocentric
disquisition. *I*
mend the tense
so the lore may
open,
fiddle with keys
to find cues
or is
deputation
allergic to
elation, mirroring
churl on its way
to stippled
evisceration.

After
the crash
the
closest
we get
is
still too
far
&
words &
speeches
don't amount
to
a hill
of cream,
dreaming
an end to

scores,
a land below
the
flakes.

By my clock
it's ten to
& the minutes
burn a hole
in my
socket, the
seconds scar
a moment after
gone
but wayward
knows no way
than toil's
triumphalist
deflation, tailoring
tokens to
abutments, tug
to tissue.
The lowliest
incursions
are marbled in
fume of
doing's dated
demotion (demolition)
crawling
toward the
crossed souls
of delay and
infusion.
Millions more
proclaim
all that they

defame—defining
polis by
madness,
common fact
by its
disdain. Once
there was
a plate, a hat
I gave it to my love
with spins & claps
but quick she
put it
far away
now
neither can we
find
to put them
on a
tray.

Less light, less light
So we may lurking go
& go atumbling to the glen
& come astumbling home again
For Felix & Emma & Jane
Have scarcely had time for blame
The march, long march to history
Has cast its shadow too far to see
& we in the haze go foundering
As far as dusk is deep
We in the glaze go floundering
& foundering sound the leaks

Waiting in line
at square restaurant
with round tables
oval windows
sky keeling
turvy topsy
yearning dissuasively
for the violas in
plaintive view
as society turns them
(everyone)
into monikers of not-sure-
what-to-do-next, certain
enjambment, virtual
expiation. "I don't
know what you
mean" "Never heard
of the pie" "Close
the closet" "Bring your
anti-dousing lip gear".
Solo flight to
expectation, illuviation
ill-illumined
quagmire.

You be the monster
I'll be
bountifully unresplendent in my
taffy-boy alligators
or
lull-me-with-a-bazooka
mint concatenations.
You be
cyclic necessity
before I take off to
overblown barrage, cuddly
tutelage, encephalic
twisters. Torched

but never
touched, saddled
with torque
(torso) of
history's elephantine
grunge (grudge). Toot
toot! No
telos—no
turkeyshoot, bombastic
(emblematic)
erasures, strip
pining. Gurgle against
dusk, put a
flume in the
goggling
apparatus—hazelnut
boom in micturating
cadavers of
mottled obliquity and
fractal
obeisance. Foam
let me foam
among the crumpled
locks of dismay's
store—the shellack
of diligence (dissidence), the
garage without entrance.
Such spray as might
bilk a mannikin,
tangle with a
dweeb. Crucify my
makeshift allowance, derogate
the hole in this
rustic avalanche of
unadulterated
charm. Beside the bottle
is the periwinkle
in sync with
blinding arbitration's

two-bit architectonics.
Betray the doily
and sunder the
swift limp of
interpolation's bogus
village. Jillions for jihads
but not one
red fence for
occipital
invagination, hydroponic
telekinesis.

Can something be
sort of
or does it have to be
yes or no
highly or discombobulated
bilious or acridly
ripe for fulmination.
If the circumstance allows
she'll recalibrate her
orbit and pass within
nanoseconds of our
outer utterance, the one
with the wigged
obelisks and shard-skin
bona-fides. Ugh! the tolling
of the turbans, the bluster
of the warps. Oops! the syncopation
of the doldrums, the
cantillation of inordinate
inherence. Yippi yi eh
yippie ey oh! frisked the
earls and made them
brisket on rye. Forty
cents, forty cents

& not a second more.
I'll be there in
blink o' inch
soon's the ink's
a sigh—soon as
the ink's a sigh
my friend, & the rain
has a pocket to
put it in.
Then I'll come
jagged & I'll come
jigged
into the higgletty piggletty
rig!

*

Yes, forty
dents, forty dents
& not a minute more.
I'll be there in a
squint & a pinch
soon's the link's
a sigh—soon as
the link's up high
my friend, & the pain
has a locket to
put it in.
Then I'll come
ragged and I'll come
wigged
into the piggletty higgletty
jig!

DAN FEATHERSTON

VIALS

ambergris a brassy pepper soil, gondola's
heaped spice nosing through flannel, cotton
channels, eddies of wooled heat. is it a slim
sand vitrified? liquidy pith telescoped in glass?
essence of x: hint of altitude in a map's flat?

a doorbell dot of vanilla. behind each ear a pulse
heating the pearl, cream, beige over ambergris'
amber tone, gris dabbled from finger to belly,
each odor's opening like syllable cleated air.

where does it go the small stain of her voice,
her hands' erasures, trill of birds unbuttoning air.
peeped from vials, columns of rain fall upward,
opening the sill's still keyboard: fugue pipes
glassy flutes her fingers loosing amber into air.

MARJORIE WELISH

TWO POEMS

PREPARING A LENGTH OF ARC

In the space of barely
indicated hospitality is Vico tasting his forks,
and his gutturals,
with uncommon interest in "undifferentiated matter."

Prepare to enter. Prepare a number
or a letter
in shame, culminating in
canvas estimated through left-handedness of
the orthographic. We must enter shyly, as in "I have no idea."

The hand in estimated area makes a vast "B."
Its biceps are backwards, and we are apprehensive
toward modern phraseology, specifically the phrase "B and B,"

doubling breakfast.
Revolutionary guidebooks
attempting "Bed and Breakfast" (which I heard as
"breakfazed"), bring exaggerated light: your bed is the bedroom
when empty; emptily your bed would play the tyrant.

What is the notation for such expressions? A specious present
the very craving of which may be "B *or* B,"—
there must be something
referred to by such expressions.

AT TABLE

Of being suitable
or to the right of the fold,
extrapolated
like this, like that intelligibility
of plate fettered to table, with programme,
academe in hand, and denoted forks speaking with us

transitorily. "Scattered totalities,"
live knife
put to glass and the future of us in words
for which a reasonable defense might be given.

To the right of the implied dish, place emphasis:
come and attempt

a fine thing:
the drift of place-setting iterated as a landmark
of the new school
attaining to non-aligned subject-object relationships.

You ask for a pledge
or sleds to barter for intensities, as plates being adjacent
bestow similacra in the manner of "winged words."

Of winged words and dwindling likeness, you are saying:
the pen is on the table; come and attempt
"a sentence of the glass-on-knife-on-dish variety."

LISA ISAACSON

NEAR DENSITY

held
a bucket of razored like kill light.
It spilled over rain and stricture. November—
Snow of nail holes.
As it fell, chains creaked.

When to look up and catch it? Ape of an instant. Will not happen.

Sun turning on the spit.

*

Each perforation white, a high stunt content sloshing.

A mask is worn in strips. Light is a strangled thing.

Black apples and a chair to kneel over. I do like that picture there.

The dress print was blown
inside out.

Cuts made a handle
the actual. It
sliced through
suns. A clip of blond death on top
water shimmers.

There is a breaking trap door sound in there.

*

I stay in the intersection. Of terrible footage.
Of hard wonder
land, and the floral
mash arrangement in vaults.

Pinched light feels like the sun, then.
I look up where the storm jams
and electricity
coats chain space
in the wind.
In the give in the water

a stain
is rusting
plant life and setting in a dull swan
as it floats on the pond
on the village cell.
You found your
crumpled up suits
soaking in the air
by threads

I'm still muttering by morning.
Kids hear bells.
The chain swings
no lie.
I know movement
For you are any
sound in the dark,
pressed to the ceiling.

Fixture at all
Levels.

*

Within an echoing garage,
a lot fails a watch.
On the back hotel stairwell
an alarm flattens
shades of the last
man to throw switches, clean
zeroes. Chamber
being lowered
into air corrugated to suggest rungs
and nothing where there is
only interval,
the furious hiding of an hour—exhausted
vandal.

*

Druggy, linked wind.

What the sharpness bloated—
and the man peeled back
when stuck with an open ray. Don't
breathe against it. What

Exists as it can in something
that thin, that used.

WENDY MCCLURE

TWO POEMS

ELEMENTED *IT*

(lines from Donne; a riddle series)

"we two being one, are it"

Was it that a bird hastened towards
a fire of its own making,

Or an opening therein—
when it says there one

Alit— where then, to slash and burn
the surrounding field

Where we were before,
and therein all the distinctions— it

Was a desert— its body played
some part or another

Amidst the desert,
or another— say

You to the whole of it only,

The phoenix to the one
iteration—

"And we join to'it our strength"

Ever since reserved the breath in which it
ascended—

Or else addressed what had begun to be
past us—

How the atmosphere was charged with it,
again, sonic boom, the set of

Wind re-aligning itself,
itself o'er space

To'advance— i.e., the air–
plane seemed to lean into the ozone

To cross over what could not be heard
as one—

"Absence, because it doth remove"

But in what *form* then— as an aperture
or a sphere—

Now the forest we were in verged into a clearing,
with palmate

Openings for rain. This made it —either way—
a circle filled with static,

& virgules through and through.
The more one spoke of leaving the more

Sense swelled in the space (whose soul is) between
the two chords,

Which should have tightened— not through and through
—that music as with all sound

"Unadmittable" here— no it was not the axis,
which travelled past the forest

And into the valediction—

"It leans and hearkens after it"

Then one looked to the center of the lake—

And is the path of the glance like a radius
or stylus—

The question is what does the water—
or what are its cogs moving to set adrift—

There's this repetition though God does not
take it up

From the surface; it sticks & won't echo—
It wants to make

One sound that might come from the current—
If that is possible—

If that is *thought to be* possible—
and the dark track of the difference

Slips at the *prayer,*
the one who brought herself here—

AUBADES

Whereby— mostly the sky outside was beset with aircraft, beset
[with noise,
in that order—

Noise on the order of *this* the vault between these waters—

*

As if you could sleep through it eventually— I watched you
[sleep meanwhile—

*

There were formations— clouds, land— and they were
[shunting—

*

You were at rest, in light of this— then you were immeasurably
[detained—

And the sun was a rumor—

It relayed low, still, to overtake—

*

And each morning you breathed, and each morning a new
[variant—

a sign, a bird, an interval—

*

The aircraft sought only the barrier—

*

So I said it was *good*—

*

It was beyond that— it begins—

*

Wherein You say nothing—

You hover the current—

DENNIS FORMENTO

ROBERT DUNCAN, ANARCHIST PRINCE

By the Second World War, Robert Duncan feared that the U.S. had begun to dominate the world in place of the defeated fascist nations. Looking back he wrote, "I saw the reality of Hitler America was fighting as lying in what America was becoming. The United States would emerge as the power in Europe and Asia that Germany and Japan had been. I had formed a mystical pacifism: All national allegiances—my own order as an American—seemed to be really betrayals of the larger order of Man. In time we defeated Hitler, and live now in a world where not only does Hitler spring anew in his homeground which our war did nothing to transform, but we find our own government more and more in his place. Butchering Germans and Japanese had not exterminated the will to power through terror but extended it." ("Man's fulfillment in Order and Strife," *Fictive Certainties,* p. 115.)

Duncan explained that Hitler "cannot be defeated; he must be acknowledged and understood." He matched Hitler and Mae West ("a sort of Dame Falstaff") as death and vulgar sensuality: "Reject Mae West as vulgar or Hitler as the enemy, reject them as fellows of our kind, and you have to go to batle against the very nature of Man himself, against the truth of things."

Nature contains all possibilities, including the unnatural. Absolute rejection of any of these possibilities means disowning "commonality with living things in order to conquer a place, exterminate the terrible, or rise above the vulgar." Duncan accepted psychic topology with all its hellholes and sexpots. He also refused to indulge in self-reproof, childish or foolish as his indulgence might be: "Hence I seek out and fortify even embarrassing sentiments—sentimentalities they can be seen to be by those critics who have put away childish things." ("The Self in Postmodern Poetry," *Fictive Certainties,* p. 220) This is Duncan explaining the multiphasic voices of his poems, but it could also be the poet on his lily pad, "a great frog in the mighty puddle of my living room," in the journal entry Olson criticized in "Against Wisdom As Such." There Charles Olson chastised Duncan's false modesty for calling himself "either more or less than he is;" in Duncan's words, "poet, self-declared, manqué." *(Human Universe,* p. 67.)

The preciousness was neither Hitler nor Mae West, but that's not the problem. The problem is that prima donnas and dictators aren't looking for understanding, no matter how much they act out. Can Hitler be "prevented" by understanding him?

Duncan would probably say that to fight the evil without seeing yourself possibly becoming just as monstrous is also evil. What good is brutality committed in supressing brutality? On the other hand, is there any other way to do it? Two wrongs make criminal justice an oxymoron. Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Dresden burned along with the prisoners of Dachau. Many people can't attain the selflessness needed to refuse eye-for-eye revenge. Many anarchists, being neither more or less egotistical than any other people, can't attain it, either.

And does nature really contain the possibility of the neutron bomb?

***

Duncan's psychology shaped his poetry by turning his prosodic development into a "search for a poetry that was not to come to a conclusion, a mankind that was in process, not progress, or let's say a picture of life—of the nature of life itself—in which no species would be an advance on another." ("Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," *Fictive Certainties,* p. 114)

And as no personality is inherently better or worse than another, all species are equally entitled to their niches in world ecology.

What Duncan thought should be done after understanding Hitler isn't clear. Forty years of exile in Gaza, tripping on LSD? Poetic justice may be no more effective than political justice in destroying evil.

Suppose poetry were more deeply embedded in our culture: would we be building fewer jails? Aztec Mexico was full of poetry, which the Aztecs served by cutting the hearts out of their slaves. Poetry's function is "to debunk by lucidity:" Pound's phrase, written, I presume, while he was lucid.

***

In Duncan's radical ecological egalitarianism, "progress" and history are irrelevant: Hitler and Mae West are more real. The typical city or forest dwellers are also more real as long as they resist stagnation. Duncan thought neither the "city sophisticate" or the "jungle bushman" was superior in Eurocentric or romantic fashion: "Both sentimentalities appeal." ("Fulfillment," *FC,* p. 114) Neither could be improved by becoming the other. Both the sophisticate and the bushman, if they are aware, live in a neverending process of change through contact and assimilation in their

environments. A successful organism is both host and parasite, food and feeder in the net.

Anarchism is commonly misunderstood to be a philosophy of chaotic violence, "every man for himself." The actual workings of anarchist decision-making can be exhausting but healthy exercises in satisfying both individual and collective will. The natural bickering and debate that take place within social groups are easier to bear than to suppress. And more than any other will to political power, the will to totalitarian rule is the most exhausting and paranoiac. The egotism and stamina needed to run for president is peanuts beside it.

Even advocates of parliamentary democracy defend the infighting of their order as symptoms of the system's health. Nobody said the search for truth would be pretty. A good many truths are pretty ugly, in fact. So it should be no surprise that a good many people think the way to reach the truth must be ugly as well: therefore might makes right, and only afterward comes paradise with wine and roses.

From an evolutionary standpoint (and from Duncan's,) destructive disorder is a source of creative opportunity. Duncan writes, "The very life of our art is our keeping at work contending forces and convictions. When I think of disorder, I often mean painful disorders, the disordering of fruitful orders that form in one's own work." ("Fulfillment," *FC*, p. 112) He means both one's work in poetry or in the world; the problem is, world disorder can mean death on a global scale, about as fruitful as World War Two. But conflict on a manageable scale breaks up old forms, tearing the individual away from familiar methods and ideas into "alien orders, marches upon a larger order." *(FC*, p. 112) This is the difference between the poet's contentiousness and the military man's.

And what's this larger order? The "larger order of man," an order of chaotic variety. Process and disorder are matter in flux; chaos is a process of continual recombination into a greater, though also temporary, order. Shifting borders in pluralistic societies and the almost universal interfaces possible (given the means) through mass and cybernetic communication make this concept of humanity more possible than it has ever been. The humanist's horror: the process of change is often bloody.

***

There are no
final orders. But the Law
constantly destroys the law
erasing lightly or with turmoil
coils of the snake
evil is, referring to

imagined goods where they
radiate.

("The Law," *Roots and Branches*, p. 26)

If there is no final order, who can define evil? And how? Suppose it's just the cosmos pushing your buttons?

***

Nearly contemporaneously with anarchist poet Kenneth Rexroth, Duncan was brought up by religious and political dissenters, people who did not fit into the spiritual or political mainstream of America. Rexroth's heritage was out of synch, too, a heritage of politics and pietists, "Schwenkfelders, Mennonites, German revolutionaries of '48, Abolitionists, suffragists, squaws and Indian traders, octoroons, and itinerant horse dealers, farmers in broad hats, full beards, and frogged coats." (*An Autobiographical Novel*, vii) They were people whose radicalism derived from old European protestantism and native egalitarianism; similar ideas nurtured Whitman. Duncan's radicalism, on the other hand, came to him as the subtext of theosophy and old European heresies of spiritual imanence and arcane cosmological systems, a spirituality foreign to protestant austerity. The universalist spiritualism of his youth eventually evolved into an ecological philosophy uniting Dante and the new physics, a kind of Unified Field Theory that made him one of the last Modernist Quixotes attempting to prolong the life of an ancient system of thought. He was an anarchist Romantic who claimed descent fom Dante. Rexroth, more practical, was a polymath who soapboxed with the intellectuals of "hobohemia." Duncan's sense of the political was always personal, psychological, and metaphysical, which he manifested in his political poetry and in his "anti-university" Berkeley discussion group. And before his draft board, where his mix of Buddhism and western psychology went over really big.

***

Spheres hum in Duncan's cosmos as in Dante's, but movements of chaotic objects by definition are not neatly predictable. His cosmos is a world "in process," not heading for the end of the world but only for a higher human creature subject to occasional devolutions, disorders contained in the set of all orders.

Duncan points out that Dante was also subversive by way of his association with the troubador tradition of rebel Provence. ("Fulfillment," *FC*, p. 116) He wrote that Dante's Beatrice, as an angel of "Active Intellect," is found in Sufism. Duncan's own idea of the muse was also female, in accord wth his belief in androgyny and the orthodoxy of his romantic

nostalgia. For instance, in the "The Maiden," *(The Opening of the Field,* p. 27) he writes:

> Because we thirst for clarity,
> the crystal clear brook Undine wakes
> unquenchable longing, in which
> jewels inocent show in lovely depths.

The Muse is both maiden and mother who imparts womanliness to her sons. From the same poem:

> Men have mothers. They are of women born
> and from this womanly knowledge
> womanly, but Christ
> was more and rare that was a maiden's Babe:
> He was part girl. He had solitude.

This idealism has baggage too, the notion that "solitude" (read, virginity?) is the only pure state, "the girl the man knows nothing of." But "girlish attitudes," associated with giggling and simpering, are counterfeits of virginity. (Presumably, boyish attitudes, like prankishness, were not Christ's problem. However, the apocryphal gospels tell a different story.) Love "apprehends" (knows and captures) and gives Dante new life, somehow without prior knowledge of any beloved; Dante's idealism is the same idolatry that rejects carnal knowledge in favor of some impossible spiritual awareness. One wonders where sex went in Duncan's cosmos after God took over, especially in the life and thought of a poet for whom the issue of sex was so crucial. And what's the difference in terms of androgyny between being "womanly" and being "part girl," for Christ's sake?

Elsewhere, Duncan uses the Christ figure in a less idealized, more psychologically accurate way. A diary entry of January 1941 describes "a cross with nails thru his body like wires and he is hung there. I am free." According to biographer Ekbart Faas, Duncan had just read Edward Westermarch's study of shamanic homosexual practices, and had for some time been calling himself a shaman poet. *(Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society,* p. 95) His Christ is a survivor or ritual ordeal, voyager to the spirit realm, returned with a Law of Love that transcends all borders. Duncan brought the lesson straight to his draft board when he answered a questionaire regarding his objections to induction. There he wrote, "The illusion of possession is a manifestation of the ego; possession of a body, a name, an honor, a person, an object, a country, a law. In so far as we defend or seek to secure these, then we

yield to this illusion, we dwell in the ego separation and we are at error." *(PPHS,* p. 92) The board must not have been impressed, because they inducted him, but the poet soon got a psychological discharge when he declared his homosexuality.

Freed from military bondage, he slashed through sexual borders. His essay, "The Homosexual in Society," published in the August 1944 issue of Dwight Macdonald's journal *Politics,* got his poem "An African Elegy," bounced from John Crowe Ransom's *Kenyon Review.* In the essay, he criticized an alleged homosexual elite for their inhuman exclusivity, from the perspective of a former insider-wannabe. In this essay, Duncan argued that "only one devotion can be held by a human being a creative life and expression, and that is a devotion to human freedom, toward the liberation of human love, human conflicts, human aspirations. To do this one must disown *all* the special groups (nations, religions, sexes, races) that would claim allegiance." *(Politics,* Aug. 1944, p. 211) Duncan's ideal human would be psychologically complete and autonomous, like the androgynous Christ of "The Maiden." No incomplete person could be free of the "protective associations" that offer the security of an exclusive fraternity in exchange for individuality.

Today the essay sounds like harmless liberal altruism, but it's unlikely that the Duncan of the Forties, reared on Old Left radicalism, would have been comfortable with today's trendy lib/rad politics of identity.

***

On the spiritual level, the presence of deity: in each individual, the divine presence obliterates inequalities based upon class, education, intelligence, etc., to form a commune of flesh and soul.

How does Duncan reconcile Dante's monarchism with modern egalitarianism? Dante's works, *De Monarchia* and the *Convivio,* form the basis of a long work ("Dante Etudes," in *Ground Work I: Before the War)* that develops concepts of "livingwithness" and a system of aristocratic egalitarianism, a sort of "Everyman a Prince." This is the last social thinking in Duncan's poetry before the Romantic deathwatch of *Ground Work II: In The Dark.*

Duncan had read and re-read Emerson in Berkeley in the 1940's. Maybe this reading sharpened his desire to create a syncretic political philosophy out of his gnostic universalism and modern left-libertarianism. He tried by disregarding some mighty large portions of Dante's ideology: God, for instance, and his regent, the emperor. And also Dante's Aristotelian belief that "Men of superior intellect naturally rule over others." Do "men" of superior intellect even crave political power? Should we quibble over who is the brighter of Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton? Or Slobodan

Milosivic and Franjo Tudjman? Granted, Dante was a rebel in his own time, borrowing ideas from heretical and non-Christian sources, such as the Arabic thinker Averroes. Duncan tries to make the translation across ideological systems work by substituting "universe" for "God," and "art" for "nature," as if art, God, natural process, and politics could be one in the same. Interesting tangent: could art and society embody the Tao? Ideally, yes, but Duncan's friend Charles Olson is a more convincing political thinker, with his hard-nosed localism and distrust of universalizing abstraction. Olson had *been there* and knew how idealism gets twisted in the service of power. Dante's universe has a goal, ("greater than the creation of man") which a process-oriented thinker ought to realize is antithetical to the never ending evolutionary universe. And no amount of verbal shapeshifting can convert the one person who rules the world, the "Monarch, or Emperor," into the ideal individual.

> For "world" read "Earth"
>
> and we know well enough then
> what "sin" and "well-being" are.
>
> Let the meaning of "nation"
>
> be brought under the orders of the living.
> ("Of Empire," p. 106, *GW:BTW)*

I think I know what he means by "sin" in this context (living "out of balance") but the reshaping of "empire" to fit something which it obviously is not, an egalitarian Earth, seems to me as dreamy as the most anthropomorphic Gaian theories. While guilt can be a motivating force in orthodox thought, it also turns basically "good" people into whining children well into their forties. And Duncan doesn't stop there in retooling orthodoxies. An echo of Pound's Confucius gets collaged in too, in "Of Empire:"

> The individual man having his own nature and truth
> and appropriate thereto his household
> outlined in relation to groups he finds
> himself in freely attending, changing,
> electing, or joining to carry forward
> the idea, the insistent phrase,
> the needed resonance into action,
>
> seeks to realize harmonies in his district
> (his order of life amongst the orders, savoring

variety, seeking out his space and time,
his life-style)
a tuning
his appropriateness)

and in the city develops themes
coordinations, names places and times,
draws perspectives, advances horizons,
humanities, public works

and in the nation (thus Olson in MAXIMUS)
to initiate
"another kind of nation" .

Who are the "people" when "Man" comes into it?
(GW:BTW, p. 106)

The Great Man's district, harmonized through his efforts: a Kung-fu-tsu man in post-modern America. His generalization "Man" actually does "people" disservice. While the concept of "the people," whether invoked by Soviet bureaucrat or American congressman, can be an abstraction and a tool of propaganda, is "Man," equally abstract, an improvement upon it? Duncan's intention is maybe to escape the class-based idea of "the people" with a more inclusive term, but who are the people but those who give "Man" substance? All homo sapiens are equally human, but Duncan falsifies their nature through nostalgia for a divinely-appointed cosmos and an impossibly perfect "Man."

***

Intuition grows harder to obey in a world edging toward collapse of traditional orders, with nationalism, fundamentalism, and mass-market identities competing to co-opt real selves. Self-knowledge is private and intuitive, and as Duncan says, no outside force can determine the movement of will. Not at least without the individual's surrender. An open-minded poetry becomes an expression of anarchic principle when it resists imposed form and suspends conclusion in favor of a process that mimics nature's cycles. However, Duncan sets a hard task for himself, to bring together Dante's medieval universe with a present-day network of savagery and synergy. Good and evil exist for Duncan, or are these just words he uses to describe the effects of the cosmos on our lives?

For an anarchist, the hardest contradiction to resolve would be the one between the hierarchical order of medieval cosmology, with the the high

place it gives to Christian morality, faith, and centralized authority, and the individualism and scientific surrationalism of the present. Mixing theocracy with anarchism is no easy matter; Duncan too glibly reconciles Dante's imperialism with egalitarianism by wordplay upon *authority* and *authorship:* the former belongs to everyone as "an authorship that comes into being throught the time of creation; a poetry in which the actualization of each member's potentiality is remembered in the whole." *(FC,* p. 117) Dante traces the concept back to the Greek, *autentin,* i.e., one who is "worthy of trust and obedience." Duncan's take resembles the idea of "possible" or "potential intellect" which Dante borrowed from Averroes. So each person's authority is based upon the creations of all humanity. The full potential of an individual's mind enters the pool of all possible thought, the Mind of God or of Nature itself. But those possibilities do include, according to Duncan's own system, brutality, greed, and avarice. Anyone who would base their personal authority on these qualities wouldn't fit Duncan's picture of idealized "Man."

In Duncan's Romantic aesthetic, Art and Nature are one. In an egalitarian community, art is made by all through the fulfillment of their personal desires. And he rightly calls this freedom. In his essay, "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," Duncan locates Dante's definition of freedom in Aristotle, wording it this way: "that is free which exists for the sake of itself and not of some other." (Compare Charles Olson's dream-delivered aphorism, "nothing is anything but itself, measured so.") Everything which exists has its own function and contributes to the whole, but nothing exists only by the will of the whole. Because he sees creation as a Darwinian "process of evolution of forms," no creature is a "final goal in the intention of the Creator." *(FC,* p. 116-117) With no unnecessary part in the universe, the variety of "individualizations, nations, and species is essential to the design." Duncan writes, "Today the World Order that we know must be imagined in terms not of one civilization but of the multiplicity of civilizations; as the imagination of Man's potentialities must search out all we know and dream of Man's experience everywhen, everywhere." *(FC,* p. 119) The dream is of potential and evolutionary process but the path is not pretty.

"Creative order is identified with the ultimate order of Reality; only here, at last, does it have its 'reason,'" Duncan writes. "Well, no wonder then that I have to break up orders, to loosen the bindings of my own conversions, for my art too constantly rationalizes itself, seeking to perpetuate itself as a conventional society. I am trying to keep alive our awareness of the dangers of my convictions." *(FC,* p. 125) And thereby Duncan provides himself with an honest person's escape from error and obsolescence.

***

The tyranny of the mass results from the individual's fear of self and fear of the crowd that engulfs him: insecurity, apathy, and helplessness sweep individuals away in the undertow. Duncan writes, "In the complex idea of our democracy, we have not only the potentiality of free communities of interest but we have, even stronger, in times of crisis, the potentiality of giving over the individual volition with its powerlessness to move the mass, surrendering the uncertain individual consciousness to the sweeping certainties of becoming one of the crowd." *(FC,* p. 128) Paradoxically, anyone who smells Bo Gritz and his militia buddies in "free communities of interest" is already acquainted with the anti-Duncan. What happens when those "communities of interest" are rabidly intolerant and paranoid?

In short, fear of the mass hysteria and loss of personal volition kept Duncan out of antiwar activism, despite his disgust with the Vietnam conflict, and drove a wedge between him and his longtime friend, Denise Levertov. He distrusted anything that didn't appear to him to be done out of pure voluntarism. The fear of losing his head to the masses or to some ruling clique prevented him from joining in with the more common political acts of mass refusal. Gone, apparently, was the young man who urged homosexuals to join their own struggle for dignity with the movements of workers and blacks. Levertov recalls his misgivings: "As a good Anarchist from his youth up, Duncan mistrusted group action; and he was just enough older than I to have a ready suspicion of 'Stalinism' every time he confronted some action planned or carried out in a way that did not strike him as entirely voluntarist." ("Some Duncan Letters—A Memoir and A Critical Tribute," in *Scales of the Marvelous,* p. 111) His suspicions may have been exaggerated, as Levertov's memories include his hesitation in 1959 regarding "a magazine he otherwise liked... merely because of its 'exaggerated estimation of Neruda... plus the poem by Celan where I (i.e., Duncan) suspected the reference to Madrid as standing for Spain in the Civil War.'" The poet even wrote a letter to the editor of this journal to find out "if there was any neo-Stalinism going on there." *(SM,* p. 111-112)

The result for Duncan, according to Levertov, was that his political ideas, formed mostly in the Forties and Fifties, "remained static," and that he didn't experience the comradeship, the recognition of apparent strangers as brothers and sisters, that so warmed the hearts of those who did feel it." *(SC,* p. 112) She writes that while this ideological difference was also a matter of temperament, Duncan was "isolated in his very real anguish; his blood pressure soared; and he could not see that there was nothing I was engaged in that was not 'volunteered from the heart.'"

Levertov was able to relieve her anxiety through action; Duncan apparently couldn't. But maybe the question was a matter of control; for instance, according to Faas, Duncan's "anti-university" discussion group in Berkeley was the poet's baby in a way that the Libertarian Circle was not for its founder, the equally opinionated Kenneth Rexroth. Faas points out that Duncan couldn't stay in the background and let others control the flow of dialogue, as Rexroth could; allegedly he insisted on being the dominant voice.

Fortunately, the wall that anti-war activity built between Levertov and Duncan didn't sever their connection altogether. Duncan wrote to her in December 1968 that "My own thought has been dark this year and in some part of it I have been apprehensive of how much more vulnerable and involved you are: I mean here about the crisis of the war and then the coming-home-to-roost of the American furies. What we begin to see are the ravening furies of Western civilization. And it corresponds with our own creative generation's arriving at the phase when the furies of our own art come-home-to-roost." His furies came home in the two books he wrote during the height of U.S. involvement in Vietnam: *Bending the Bow* and *Roots and Branches*. Both were obsessed with American imperialism and its "power over" the individual and the masses.

***

Some degree of power is wielded in any group; what the individual does about it determines his or her political stance.

Because for him the taint of coerced activity hovered over group projects, sloganeering, pickets and marches, the practical manifestation of Duncan's politics came in his poetry. In "The Multiversity," *(Bending the Bow*, p. 70), he writes that certain men are

> not men but heads of the hydra
>
> his false faces in which
> authority lies
>
> hired minds of private interests
>
> over us

There he exposed the lies of those who had surrendered their individuality in the service of power: the Chancellor of the Berkeley campus; Adlai Stevenson; certain professors. Oppression is a crime on the level of treason

in the mind of an anarcho-pacifist, for whom all political power is inherently violent. Duncan weighs the "police law" of invested public authority against the "inner law," which he believes these men crushed within themselves. The "aging professor, translator of fashionable surrealist revolutionaries" is equally as evil as the "monopolists, obstructors of knowledge," in Pound's so-called "Hell Canto." Consistently with his fear of manipulation by powers above, Duncan locates the nature of evil in the root of the word "evil" itself, where he thought a word's most powerful and primordial meaning resided. The root of evil is, he maintains, the desire to rule over others—"evil" is related etymologically to "up" or "over." Desire for illegitimate rule acts through "simulacra of law that wld over-rule" (as a judge might) "the Law man's inner nature seeks." "Outside of the freedom of individual volition," there can be no community; where individual volition exploits labor or nature, there is rule by "simulacra of law," and community is ruined. Legitimate self-interest exists only in recognizing the self-interest of others.

Revolt against conformity was as much a part of the Sixties as civil rights or revolutionary violence; national chauvinism and racism formed the backbone of a society that young people of all ethnicities and classes rejected with disgust. And that society rejected them just as thoroughly.

> Where there is no commune
>
> the individual volition has no ground.
>
> Where there is no individual freedom, the commune
>
> is falsified.
>
> ("The Multiversity")

***

> his own
> ideogram
>
> a tuning in
>
> ("The Individual Man," p. 104,
> *Ground Work: Before the War)*

For a homosexual man there's a heightened meaning of the home: a place where the mask of sexual indifference to other men can be taken off.

In "The Individual Man," Duncan uses the tuning fork as an ideogram for "his nature and truth" as it is outlined in relationship to the community or groups "appropriate to his household."

Duncan's community begins at home and extends to those other households and communities which best support his own. "We convivial in what is ours," "Friends/in every giving radiant!" His gushy and perfect generosity might be impossible for many of the people in those appropriate households. Yet the communal idea is legitimate. Like the potluck, this kind of anarchic networking is a natural solution to the problem of poverty and individual need—can't afford to throw a party? Give generously and receive graciously, barter for needs and services, share food and shelter. Networking is anarchistic in form becaue it grows out of uncoerced relationships of family, tribe, or created community, beyond any state apparatus. It requires no money at the point of exchange, because it comes from the heart, volunteered. Even people who have never read *Mutual Aid* do it anyway, giving naturally out of love. Who needs an -ism to justify it?

***

Dante, Duncan says, isn't a "mind researcht in the lore of another time, for me, but immediate, everlastingly immediate, to the presence of the idea of Poetry." But he seems to accept Dante's politics uncritically, as if his ideas were self-evident, just as Dante accepted assumptions about the nature of reality and the existence of God. Here's the entire text of "Lovely," in *Ground Work I: Before the War* (p. 114):

Lovely

the way Dante bestows himself
monarchial throughout his thought

and in every imagination

adhering to his source!

God does rush in. Duncan substitutes a pedestal for a throne, and reads Dante's monarchist language as enlightened individualism:

> It's here, as presiding presences in a realm of poems, that I read his *"principium,"* his *"civitas,"* and *"monarchia"* to be. Whatever they once were in a world of popes, city states and emperors, they remain, translated powers, present today in the state of volunteered individualities and social consciences and responsibilities, true to my sense of our good.
>
> ("Preface" to "Dante Etudes," *GW:BTW*, p. 94)

Elsewhere, Duncan puns glibly on the origin of the word "authority," as spoken of earlier. (*FC*, p. 117) If "power over" is power ill-gotten, isn't obedience to authority (power) dangerous? Appeals to "authority," even if personal and limited imply obedience to power; mutual aid disappears in Duncan's social ethic in favor of an appeal to ducal authority cut in a contemporary style. If in a dispute, I follow my individual conscience, don't I disobey another princely voice? If I'm a "worker for the good of all," am I no longer an authority, but a servant instead? Dante's monarchism is as vestigial and obsolete as the human appendix. A prince without a principality is a frog in his castle. His range of association would have to be narrow in a world populated entirely by princes and princesses; I don't think anybody could sustain that much deference toward so many people, while expecting the same treatment in return. What happens when these modernized forms of courtly authority clash? Duncan says each person must be "princely in his regard and mine—or else democracy lacks rule," but in fact, do we really lack rule? In fact, we *are* ruled, by the same "power-over" that Duncan rightly found so reprehensible during the Vietnam war. His politics is a kind of intellectualized form of Huey Long's slogan, "Every man a king." Every Man A Prince!

Historically the high regard princes have held themselves in has done them and everyone else irreparable harm through their wars, purges, pogroms, and persecutions. Duncan's late politics is a philosophy based on nostalgic faith in an impossible ideal. Best suited for intimate households, it fits the utopian nature of Duncan's thought, but not this hard world where "noble" princes are as hard to come by as saints and saviors.

The question is not whether poets should stay away from politics nor how far they should stay away, but how real they should be. I'm not proposing that a poet's place in is the House (god, no) or on the picket line. A poet's critical intelligence and creative imagination are sorely needed in this world but go to waste in an airy castle, in pursuit of an archaic sublime. Utopias are hard to come by, and they go wrong when impossible standards of behavior are favored over basic relationships of aid and exchange. Duncan's "zealous liberality," as idealistic as it is, is more convincing in its advocacy of generosity than his daydream of a princely personal authority because it deals with the basic impulses and most probable needs of everyday people.

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ASSEMBLING ALTERNATIVES:

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PAMELA WYE

CHRIS MARTIN DRAWINGS: "FIND THE DOOR TO THE WALL WHERE THERE IS NONE"

Chris Martin's recent work is a series of large black paintings (in the 11' x 12' range) where white lines almost describe the simple rectangles of linear perspective like empty picture frames, painting stretchers or windows without a view. I say "almost" because Martin subverts the language our eyes know by heart by changing the course of a few lines and causing our sight to detour away from the illusion of three dimensional space and back into the circuits of our own mind. The vast blackness of these paintings defines inner, not outer, space. Martin often paints words on top of these white lines, making the paintings even flatter by bringing the eye to the frontmost surface where words normally reside. The text doesn't read in a linear fashion, but hums along the periphery of consciousness. Although the paintings do not have illusionistic depth, the viewer finds herself in a spare black landscape, in ascetic retreat from the busyness of the world. These tantric, zen-like images allow the mind to contemplate itself and to contemplate contemplation. Martin's paintings define a space where the mind travels within itself via a strict yet fluid path. The experience is more than one of simply seeing, it is akin to physically feeling the mechanism of contemplation. Martin has said that looking at the screen in a movie theater he found himself thinking "how much bigger is that than my paintings?" The analogy is apt. Like Martin's big paintings, the darkened movie screen is the quiet, self-reflective respite from the noisy surfeit of image after image after image.

Alongside these large paintings, Martin draws and draws in an on-going, diaristic, stream of imagistic consciousness. Splotches, drippings, rubbings, scribbles. His list of materials is orgiastic: "charcoal live burning sticks at the campsite hot coals smoke (hold the drawing over the fire. . .) tea juice blackberries blueberries dirt colored rocks paint any kind of paint gouache watercolor inks latex acrylic oil enamel sand hair grease shoe polish pencils fountain pens magic markers collage spices (especially turmeric yellow. . .) glitter glue. . .mercurochrome oil stick working with brushes with fingers with towels sticks squeegees droppers. . .paint with my feet with eyes closed eyes wide. . ."[1]

The range of imagery in the drawings is broad and more narrative of the artist's psyche. Yet despite their small scale, the drawings' impact is still physical. They have the self-contained solitariness of emblematic images that describe being, not acting.

"I love paper. . .love paper of all kinds love feeling it in my hands collecting it rubbing it stacking it in piles collecting it into folders notes endless notes. . ."

Martin has drawers full of drawings like dream remnants that never seem to be finished. They are vivid yet fragmentary, cryptic yet certain. He sees one after a long absence and starts working it again. Like doodles, these drawings often happen on whatever is under hand. Complementing the monastic absence of everyday mess in the paintings, Martin's drawings revel in the clutter, the profoundly effecting traces of this and that. He's on the alert for that everyday surface that clicks as it crosses his path, and he uses it.

"Can begin with automatic gesture paintspill spattering deposit a mess some stuff there. . .on the page can begin with tea stains on old paper can begin with a telephone list. . .some handwriting. . .someone else's scribbled notes. . .on old book pages. . .some notes some line already on legal paper, the back of an old letter a torn paper bag. . .wrinkled aluminum foil wax paper tissue paper bark leaves an old t-shirt torn photos. . ."

Like his paintings, Martin's drawings start with a geometric impulse then evolve into something else altogether. This is what gives his work its aura of minimalism. In "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," Anna Chave writes: "By manufacturing objects with common industrial and commercial materials in a restricted vocabulary of geometric shapes, Judd and the other Minimalist artists availed themselves of the cultural authority of the markers of industry and technology."[2] Now Martin, though operating with a vocabulary of geometric shapes disaligns himself from the "rhetoric of power" by contaminating pure geometric form with all sorts of viscera and messy attributes. Eugene Goosen wrote that, with Minimalism, "the spectator is not given symbols, but facts."[3] Though Chave brilliantly argues that Minimalism is, in fact, laden with symbolic associations (to power, most notably), the common art-historical scenario has been that it took "post-minimalist" artists like Eve Hesse to reinscribe symbolic content (sexuality, for example) to minimalist art. It is to this "contaminated," associative, content-laden minimalism that Martin's drawings relate.

In *Untitled (rising energy spiral nowhere here),* (1994) the painterly white spiral is phallic in its tip and its hanging, yet in its upward spiral, comes undone, and evolves into an inverted triangle, the hieroglyph signifying female genitalia. *Blue Curtain,* (1994) with its minimal rectangular form and parallel lines becomes, with the inclusion of one wavy line,

a hieroglyph for curtained windowness. "Curtains in my room as a child thirteen feet tall." This small drawing certainly has the demeanor of a tall, unyielding, and formal authority figure. How far from minimalism's "rhetoric of power," yet how strangely powerful is this subverted domestic geometry. Minimalism did away with the "cultural marker" of the painting as a window onto a world. No more windows, no more worlds. Martin looks to the sides of that window that is no longer and sees curtains—that cultural marker of the inner world. ". . .find the door to the wall where there is none."

Martin's drawings often have the wet viscous quality of monotypes. In a monotype one "draws" directly in the wet ink, then pulls one "print" in a one-shot-deal that effectively wipes out the "drawing." *Untitled (King Cock) the one eyed phallus. . .a mind of his own. . .weeping depressed phallus on a throne (Jung dream)* (1992) has that quality of capturing a dream image quickly before it disappears or is chased by our pursuit.

The drawings echo the paintings' motifs but are more experimental, accidental, automatic compared with the paintings' rigorous focus. *I Am Not I. . .* (1988-90) has Martin's familiar centralized starburst form (Martin calls them "explosions"). The text scrawled on the arms of the starburst angrily asserts the artist's own identity with a litany of his artistic ancestors' names: "I am not Alfred Jensen, I am not Bill Jensen, I am not Hilma Klimt, I am not Forrest Bess, I am not Jim Morrison. . ." *Apparition with Seven Cocks for Estelle Bellomo* repeats the starburst motif but with an out of control gestural energy and a centralized dream-like cock-figure. Words visible at the top indicate this drawing was done on letterhead of *The American Journal of Art Therapy*. Of this drawing, Martin writes "unconscious self portrait monster ridiculous afraid embarrassed actual self we can't show (even to ourselves)." Combining wet fluidity with a rhythmic circular motif of miniature bursts, *For Liza Toft* ("delicate flower unfolding vaginal sea growth Mexico") (1995) has mesmerizing aquatic/sexual associations. *Ajijic, Mexico* "seven pointed star—numbers and the absurdity of counting. . .starfish figure splayed out crucified skinned stretched martyrdom of the body. . ." anthropomorphizes the starburst and includes another of Martin's paintings' elemental motifs—the small crosses, or X's, depending on how you look at them. *Untitled ("swirling snaking rising serpent smoke energy")* is a snake-like spiral that rises like smoke covered with crosses that read as cemetery markers. "The funeral pyre death and rebirth every moment each cross a tiny marker place space in time the effervescent swirling smoke there is nothing that remains that does not vanish each moment there is no birth and there is no death."

Jersey City
January 1996

Notes

1 All quotes by Chris Martin taken from a letter to the author dated January 8, 1996.
2 Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine*, January 1990,44-63.
3 Eugene Goosen, *The Art of the Real: U.S.A. 1948-1969* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), quoted in Chave p. 45.

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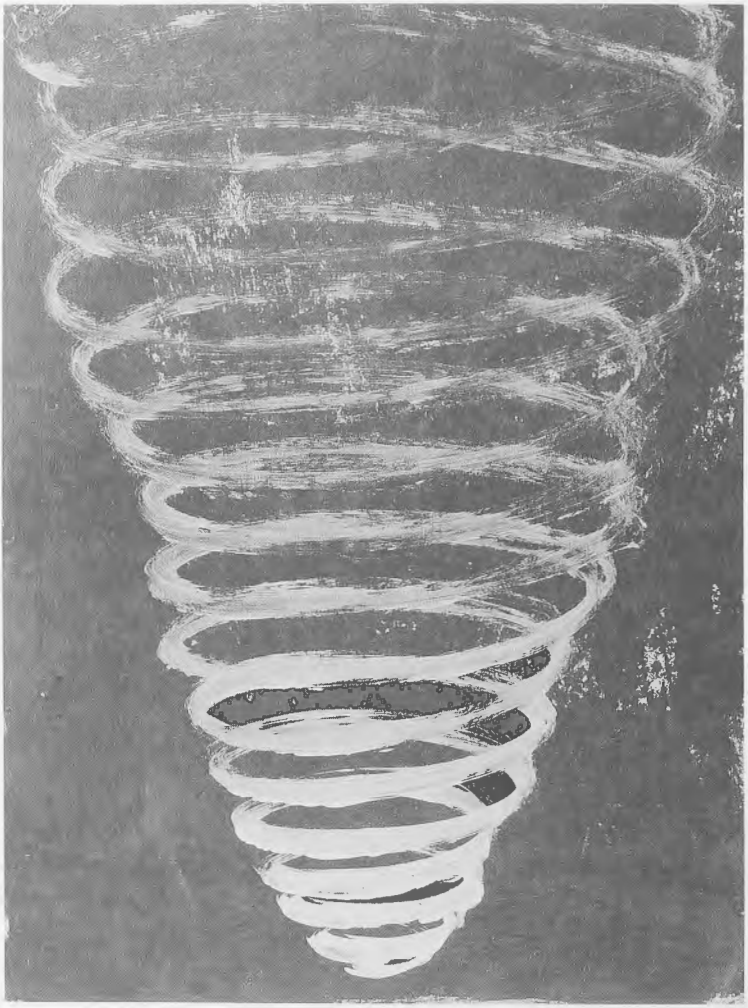
CHRIS MARTIN

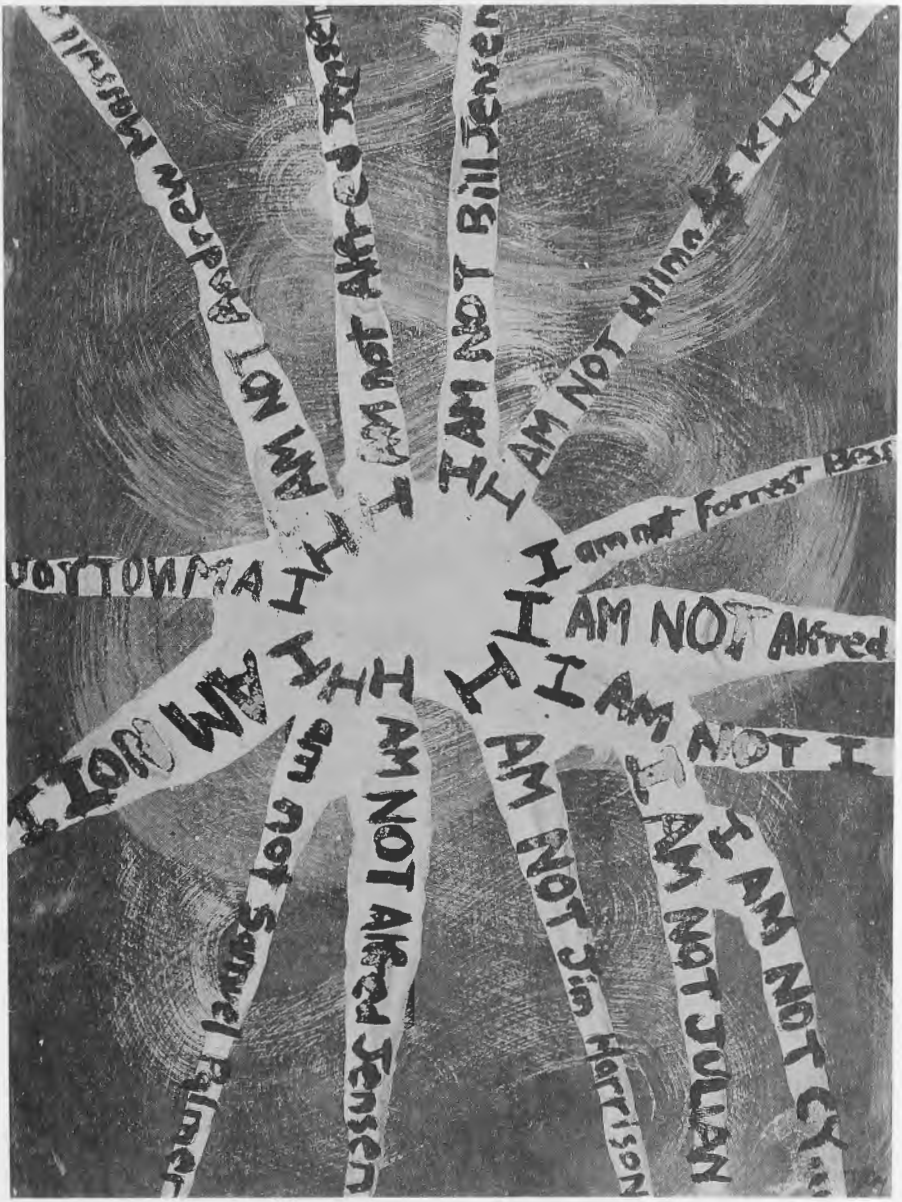
EIGHT DRAWINGS



Untitled ("rising energy spiral nowhere here")
All Martin photos by John Berens

"Blue Curtain"

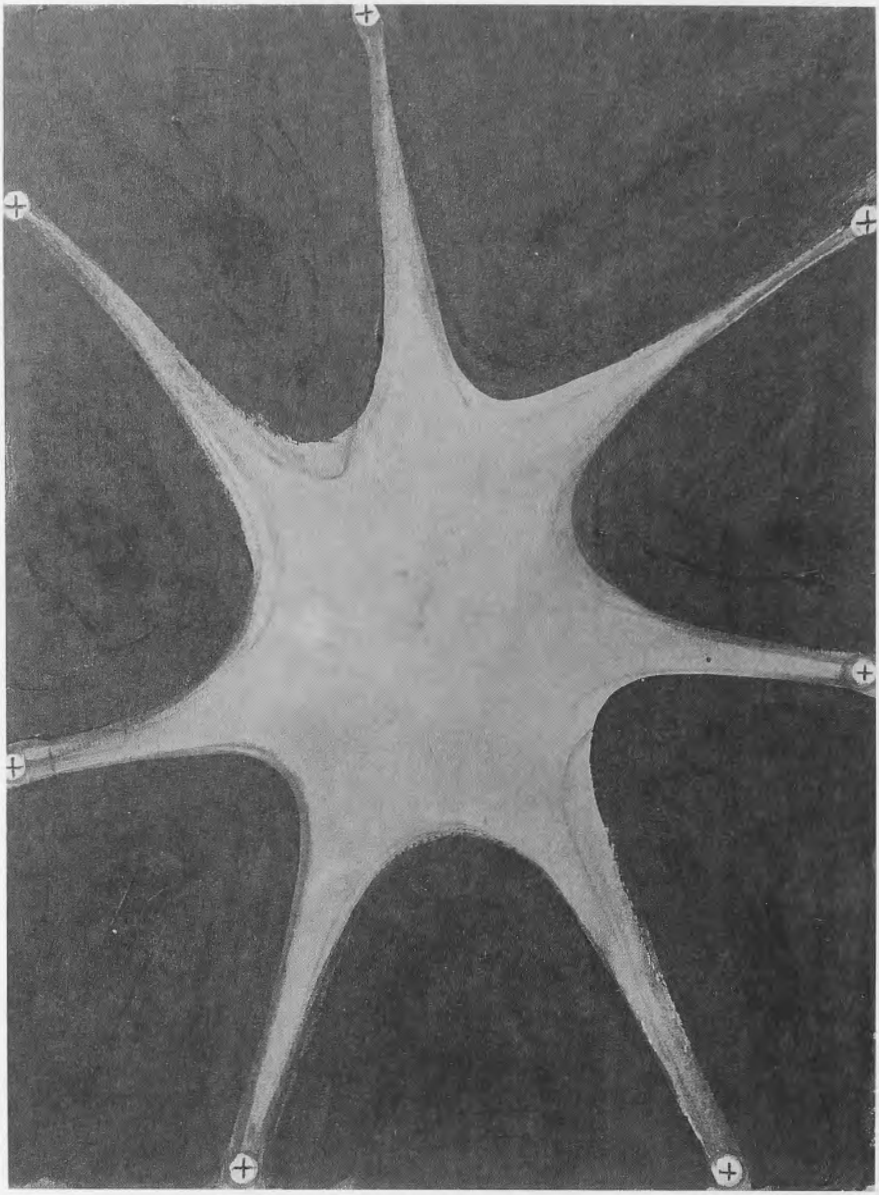
"King Cock"


I AM NOT Bill Jensen
I AM NOT Hilma
I AM NOT Alfred
I AM NOT
I AM NOT Jim Harrison
I AM NOT JULIAN
I AM NOT
I AM NOT Alfred Jensen
I am not Samuel Rubin

"I am not I. . ."

"Apparition with Seven Cocks for Estelle Bellomo"

"For Liza Toft"



"Ajijic, Mexico"

Untitled ("swirling snaking rising serpent smoke energy")

LINDSAY HILL

SHE PLAY

She play that throw your voice in the dead man game
She tamp her voice down deep outside herself
Pull from that frozen slant-front eat-hole slot
A baby I want you baby baby I want you
She coy her broken mouth and say she charmed
Slouch and spin the pistol cylinder
She narrow back into her throw-voice self
He say he want that crotch-lick candy game
She dick him in the mouth with the pistol point
Ask him how he like suck-gun roulette
He call her daddy's pop-tease sugar-slut
The gun make that little bomb in the melon noise
He nod once up and down like he agree
She back and forth her voice in a haywire stitch
Fill him like a bull-dog fills his bitch

IAN DEMSKY

ASPECTS

•

But this time the gull doesn't obey
its wings and becomes a fetal comma's
fracturing dissuasion:

the paper valves of my heart
bang shut on the slender means
in the doors of my blood.

•

Another reason was a lie.

Years passed you by and you carried
them back broken and with a dialysis
of saliva

like kissing.

•

The domination of a little boy's
favorite dream. The hangman's beautiful
daughter makes room in her flesh
for eyes to touch her.

I have eaten your
horizon,
drained the blood.

•

Where your hips insist

the body arranges its breath.

•

The shape of a name gives way to a body
and a body

with a body passing through.

Each tooth cuts its Sanskrit
in the undertow of retreating tongues,
divesting stolen words of their innocence.

In the cabin where the wood heat freezes
to the ceiling.

•

The calligraphy of your face breaking
under his indiscretions. *There will be*
a time

some years from now, when you will forgive
him, or someone else,

and that alone will kill you.

•

A hemorrhage of digestive thoughts.
And you remain

most of what almost disfigures.

ELĒNI SIKÉLIANÒS

from EARDRUM'S THEORY

Dear T. —

humor me—
what *is* this body ?

•

bleeding ten tons of blood mid-hole
Friday's wood-lung home alone now move twice &
twice old Mother broke the legs off her dress
gone 29 years of service mine rhapsodic birth-
road that stream I see

•

& I am of the skull & corpus vertebrata hiding inside
the microscopic structure of a bone

& my osteoclasts will tear it down & my osteoblasts will build it
[back

& I am of chordata & endoskeleton hiding inside
a star the buildings of dust that stuff (creamatorium)

& I am of hominidae & anthropoidea Look my 2000 cc brain
[capacity

& this is my heart's atrium & the a. of my tympanic cavity
& here is my hepatic vein
& here, my oral hood
my vestibular canal, my organ of Corti
my homo sapiens' larynx, my mons pubis
& here, my axillae armpits, milk-lines along each side & I am
[hiding between
the dawn ape & nuclear fission

If you can't find me at the Lake of Aegyptopithecus
Look for me at Child of the Hook, my black-bone burning

my blank spine

ANATOMY REPORT

The rumors are untrue. I have not
sold off my green-splitting organs:

- flame-cell system intact
- arterioles, artesian by the gill bright-red
- daily cardiac output, 2000 blood-liters & up
- stomach, intestines the five-span fear
- ventricular valves of a dog
- adrenals of 1 green deer
- spleen branching bone-picked
- kidneys that jump (the size of an ear)

I am still of the mouth—mixed
a bit with the air & the beast, a blind-
ended lymph & a heart

that contracts

thus

praise be her
brightness-back

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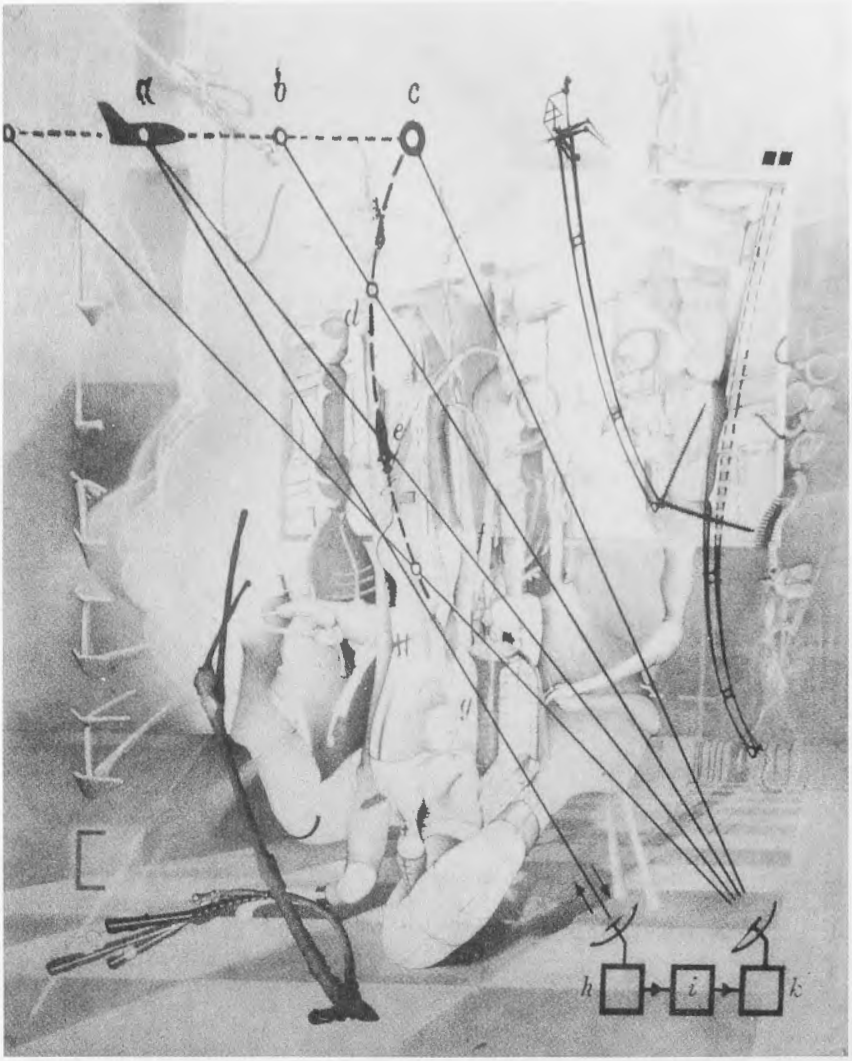
DRAWING



JED RASULA

TITLE UNTITLED

[for Mark West]

They've been generous, I see, and given you
a tube of gel with a mirror

to have built a net
in the shape of what a word would be
if it were a word instead of a net.

The title might be Untitled.
It can't be found in the *where,*
the *where* is in *it.*

That royal family
—including the dog and the dwarf—
cubed out through the hole in the mirror's wall.
They haven't come back.
But it looks like they're still right there.

So you find a keychain on the beach
with a plastic human hand attached,
the ocean roar
under it like a leaf, botanical mumbler.
The room of coming and going
screws in off the top of that wave,
and you wonder where they *went?*

Say you bent down to pick up that wrist
and the key jumped into the palm of your hand,
magnetic erotic contact. Something peels back

in the limbic nodes—The door came off in your hand, didn't it?

In the dream I watched the street hubub slowly congeal into a mosaic and realized that what I'd taken for movement was evaporation shimmer off the hot asphalt. Leaning forward, reaching out to feel the tiles and yes, they're real. The grout too is solid. Wiping my fingers over the tessellated scene one particular tile disturbed me, gave me an odd sensation. It was the underside of my own foot, cemented into place.

"I have at this moment
so many fundamental thoughts,
so many truly metaphysical things to say,
that I suddenly get tired
and decide not to write anymore,
not to think anymore, but allow the fever of speaking
to make me sleepy,
and with my eyes closed, like a cat,
I play with everything I could have said."

(Pessoa #520)

Eyesight grips the cage of the seen
and the suction begins. Halfway between
shadow and gaze light became noisy.
A word for this is blue,
which you can nuzzle like a ballad
till the flippers on the dolphin fall asleep.

Next time
you'll think that doorknob's a clitoris. Down on your knees,
you lick the brass and fit your tongue around it
carefully drawing it in all the way back
till it touches a tonsil, a bell that says "tumbling dice."
There's no readout yet
but wedges of crowing erection
smear with your thought.
You *have* been being here
beformerly. That's it—the sound a little
slowed tonight, tongued up, butterfly ignited

creaming over your lower back and buttocks
as unborn fingers
gather excited in the air, unable to touch
but intent on somehow *knowing*.

That was when a door became apart.

A button. A tunnel.
A glowing coal.
Yourself the manifest space of time
with a pile of slices of Now.

So how about
forgetting where the memory theater went?
Point to the pane of glass in the cranial house
and say "she." She'd been grazing, it seems,
all the way down through Umbilicus Daylight
when she got to the bottom and lapped up *you*.

You told me those weren't legs at all.
They were erotic calipers.
A faint moist smack
when they decompress.
The way a lute
becomes a helicopter.

In the sagittal adventure of lovemaking
the bodies become collections of beakers,
pouring retaining expending wallowing conserving all at once.
The skin of names
vibrates over everything they begin to forget. The Howler. The Roarer. The Crackler. The Rubber. The Hummer. The Gurgler. The Hisser. The Whistler. The Burster. The Croaker. The Rustler.

He said it was a wrinkle.
But from where he appears to be standing
the paintbrush is probably a doorhinge.
A new color is another door.
He cranks his face off and, lifting it up,

shows us two moths that flutter out of the damp spots
where his eyes have been.
It's not enough to graze their wings on the hot bulb of looking;
they have to be smoky and frail.

And I wonder, how did it get to be you
when the dot grew closer?
Were you really that small?
Was the squeaky wheel of September crickets
filling the jaw with the sorrow of snow,
the door going out like a dark?

Whatever she said
slid backwards over the floor
as if every sensation
lapsed pulsing
delicious entropic
detumescence. And wetness
everywhere
was a new sound,
and the name of your
heartbeat was Weeping Bones.

That hood or it looks like beak is a rudder.
A soul is not being
or action,
but atmospheric pressure. And what did you say
compassion was?—each angel
joined itself upside down
and inside out
and wriggling into our faces
they look just like each of us knowing what we know.
Carnal angels
through whom we've been skimming,
belly to belly. Spinal clatter
appearing as lines of geese in flight. Unspoken phrases
booming in the silence of the empty room,
coiling great hoses through each other's bodies,

dislodging heaps of winkled fruit,
dozed out all over the blanks and oblivions.

"There is no glue between the organs, but they are always
loving each other, and always
using each other. No wonder they cohere...
likeness and liking
are the gold wedding ring of the universe."

{James John Garth Wilkinson,
The Human Body and its Connexion with Man
[1860] p. 273}

Over a period of about a year, during several visits to Ottawa to review student projects for the School of Architecture at Carleton University, I watched with fascination as Mark West evolved the drawing to which this poem responds. The discontinuities in the poem reflect the temporal lag time of composition, but are more keenly responsive to the appearances and disappearances, the phantasms and erasures, of West's drawing. What is reproduced here is the final stage of the drawing, completed after the poem.

LEIGH HUNT

TYGER, TIGER

If fire is
as fire seems

then fire dreams

JOSÉ LEZAMA LIMA

SIX POEMS

(Tr. from the Spanish
by Roberto Tejada)

OCTAVIO PAZ

In the crackling whirlwind
the Japanese warrior inquires about his silence,
and upon descending into hell,
he is answered by the blood-pissed bones
of the livid Mexican goddess.
Marzipan fringed with portent
rivals the placenta of the sacred cow.
The Pavilion of nothingness fingers a lofty breeze
which it transforms into a gory snail.
In Rio de Janeiro, the carnival tugs at a noose so that
suddenly the lights flick on and we find ourselves in a room.
On San Luis Island, the conversation
—a snake burrowing like a spear through the side—
lights the lanterns of the Tibetan city
and it rains, like a tree, upon my ears.
The bat from Trinidad,
strange calm over the insular Tao,
with its lovely mustache puffing smoke.
Everything everywhere looming.
It is the deer that sees the snake in the calls
of the river; nature slipping
on the scales that invoke an inaugural rhythm.
Naming and name-making in a groping blindness.
The masked voice commanding the kings of Greece,
the blood adverse to the nocturnal tongs
returning to the original whirling sphere.
Asleep on the terrace, the priest

awakens with each word he slings
at the partridge falling into its steel mirror.
The word in motion
at the instant of release parading
now through the resistant numbers,
in the plausible city
built for the formless inhabitants beginning
to breathe. Deep in the wood the dances
arrived in costume—but the fire
by then had already uprooted the horizon.
The dormant city evaporates its language,
the fire roaming like water
along the rungs of my arms.
The new, illegible ordinance
lifted the head of a mumbling Crusoe.
Only the fire mirrored
the silent mass of the shipwreck.

March & 1971

SURPRISED

I can't. I mean it. And the horse begins bending the poker deck.
Just a minute. The grapefruit's cleared of rain. I'm spelling.
What question fits? What elbow intermingles?
The thurifer has soaked himself, withdrawing.
These are witnesses, oaths, platitudes.
An index finger crooked as a nose,
pointless, cinders, rounding off.
A cardboard riposte. Certain conceits.

A ribcage against the light, a waterspout
fattening the lantern as it doles out Christmas cards.
I scratch, I move on, I plunge—not a single navigator left.
I touch, I turn the other cheek. Now a patter on the blinds.
A crisscross of fish between legs spread open. Scissors.
A word of advise: the balding poker deck never gave birth.
The dribbled window chews the rosebud,
its blinking in focus, the shattered glass roaming,
then the jerking, the capsized shark.
Poltroonishly, boots are scraped over stubble
trudging back along the sidewalk at noon.
The salamander, in a fever,
keeps leaping off the pea coat.
I can't. I'm going to bed. I'll wake up with my amulet missing.
As they spin a carpet, spiders tangle their tiny threads.
Mr. Air assembles and decapitates.

May & 1971

UNLEASHED

The potato's humor was unleashed,
the proximity of the lettuce green
was laughing at the bottom of the sack,
followed by feigned composure
in the crumpled wrinkles of the brown paper bag.
When the alarming size of the sack
arrives with its edible stones,
it procures a pair of ghostly scissors
and starts to frolic on the rooftops.

The potato waits to be tattooed with soot,
to have its peel blessed with bruises
as they are offered by a face willing to be
devoured by smoke rising from the vulture's beak.
Despair. It's this pear, we say,
its warm wool avarice
about to begin, a beetle-browed wool
hoarding coins in the basement.
The potato came to enhance
the old concierges of Europe.
It took care of the rheumatism in their purses,
it blessed the day after tomorrow.
Skilled now, it made them
cheerfully nod this cozy secret:
the glittering tavern, a diamond at midday,
and our sweat watching gilt
proclaim its pretentious saliva.

June & 1971

THE NECK

Like a rainbow-colored surge
a bottle-neck
resembles the devil's throat.
A finger won't fit
and peering inside, the eye happens upon
snakes at the bottom, deepened with borage.
Like a frog,
I'm inside the bottle, my body

an Atlas between the cork
and one leg slowly surveying
its maternal foundation.
Grape and glass are related,
an undecodeable balance,
like air on the scale of Osiris.
The morning dewdrops over the grape
are like a bird's breathing:
first a bundle, then a fog-shaped body
beginning to breathe.
To uncork, the glassy eyes of a Sioux Indian,
the moment from peach fuzz
against the light
and then the waterfall surrounded by rings,
and by cries that encircle the body dictating
the new bodies stumbling
over the rocky flesh of the navel.
Inside the bottle,
one-third of a year in a damp cave,
a skeleton, a mill, a wedding:
the prison baroque.

24th of June & 1971

THEY SLIP THROUGH THE NIGHT

Packed with musicians,
a station wagon at midnight
rattling over old stones,
with silver filaments
like those I saw in Taxco

as I entered the city.
The comedic fat-lady
and the wormy lover
fumbling with the lock
on a window—affected speech
as they pull their hair.
Shouts and bells,
the hues of a cheek
slip toward the bellowing sound
of piss relieved
by the swimming horses,
with parasols
over their swollen flanks.
Earthtone grays
and violet flashes
boast about the rumble
deciphered by the street lamp.
With theatrical jejune,
the abandoned house
frames the musicians
who go by.
Hovering there is the apostrophe
of an arm in demand
outside the window,
crusted with frost of many feathers.
Then a grandfather clock
joins the crowd,
as it doubles-over with laughter
like each musician sinking
into his sleigh-bell pillow.
The originative tassels of time:
like the pistols drawn by Monte-Cristo
or sperm-filled sacs deflated in a river.
As for the rooster?
It spread its legs
and pointed with an index finger.
And then the crackling ember
of a cigarette.

7th of October, 1971

DISSONANCE

As to the contradiction of contradictions,
the contradiction of poetry,
to render the stone's reluctant reply
with a puff of smoke,
and to return to water's clarity
in search of the serene ocean chaos
severed in two: a continuity that questions,
and a rift in response,
like a hole crawling with larvae
in which, afterwards, a lobster will repose.
Its eyes tracing the carbuncular circle,
miasmas being lobsters with flaring eyes,
one half nestled in the void,
the other half clumsily scratching
the frenzy of the annotated faun.
First contradiction: to walk barefoot
over the interlacing leaves
that cover the burrows where the sun
fades like a weary sword
slashing a bonfire, newly planted.
Second contradiction: to plant bonfires.
Final contradiction: to enter
the mirror approaching us,
where backs can be viewed,
and in the likeness, eyes
begin over the eyes of leaves,
the contradiction of contradictions.
The contradiction of poetry,
effacing itself and plunging forward
with the laughable eyes of a lobster.
Each word destroys its appoggiatura
and traces a secular Roman bridge.
Each word spins in place like an affectionate
dolphin, surfacing
as faintly as a phallic prow.
Lips pursed hard when they announce

the order to retreat.
A word explodes and the sleigh dogs chew
the lanterns hanging from the trees.
As to the contradiction of contradictions,
the contradiction of poetry:
efface the letters, and then inhale them at dawn
when the light effaces you.

December & 1971

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Sulfur readers will be familiar with the poetics of Cuban modernist José Lezama Lima (1910-1976), represented over the years among these pages in superb translations by James Irby, including "Ten Prose Poems" in *Sulfur* 3 (1982), and the stunning essay "Confluences" in issue 25 (1989). Although his reputation in English almost entirely rests on his novel *Paradiso*, Lezama's full body of work is even still more imposing. The complete works include over five-hundred pages of collected poetry and certainly twice as many pages of essays and assorted prose.

Written from 1971 to 1976, and posthumously published in 1978, *Fragmentos a su iman*—from which the above poems were translated—reveals a series of final inflections in Lezama's lifelong "poetic system." Without the unabashed symbolist swirl or constraining elegance of previous work—but with the unstoppable onrush of his long-poem *Dador*, for example—*Fragmentos* features a more audibly strident cadence in the way the poems enact a three-ring circus of images telescoped into immanent high-minded slapstick ("They Slip Through the Night") or stop-action still-lifes about to implode ("The Neck") wherein the subject of poetry can be scrutinized as though "effacing itself and plunging forward / with the laughable eyes of a lobster." ("Dissonance").

The writing in *Fragmentos* is loaded with images of isolated enclosure and resignation: a veritable "prison baroque." [For all intents and purposes,

after 1959, and despite the success of *Paradiso*, Lezama's writing remained blatantly unrecognized by an oblivious cultural apparatus, and the writer essentially lived in self-imposed confinement during the latter years of his life.] *Fragmentos a su iman* might well be translated—and in keeping with the provisional world of Lezama: that is, tentatively—as *The Fragments Drawn by Charm*. The poems here are often generated by a sense that matter and meaning are incessantly staging apocalyptic rehearsals of "a genesial, copulative relatedness": an all-encompassing, cyclonic conjunction or totalizing ejaculative surge where "Everything everywhere [is] looming." Indeed, as is clear to anyone who has read *Paradiso*'s infamous Chapter VIII, Lezama was obsessed with the phallic illusoriness of monumental scale and excess. [For more on Lezama's own views regarding his poetic system, readers should consult the interview with Armando Alvarez Bravo published in *Sulfur* 24 (1989).]

A lifelong asthmatic, with symptoms that perhaps became even more pronounced with age, and with the years of sparsity following the Revolution, when medications became increasingly more difficult to obtain, Lezama Lima would come to define poetry as a "photograph of breathing." It is in this sense that the fits and starts of imaginal sequence come to formally rhyme here with the repeated references to actual respiration. In his poetics of the paradox whereby conflicting opposites momentarily coexist in procreative stand-off, Lezama Lima sought, not only as suggested by Rubén Ríos Avila, that is, to make of his respiratory system a syncopated microcosm for the solar system and, by extension, for universal knowledge, but to re-articulate, effusively, the severed nature by which imagination and material reality are separated as "a continuity that questions / and a rift in response."

GUSTAF SOBIN

LATE BRONZE, EARLY IRON: A JOURNEY BOOK

for Michel Py

once again, found yourself traveling in the direction of your own, broken landscapes.

plumbing sound, extracting fracture.

there where the air—either side—had gone saline.

'glasswort,' you'd jotted down as if the word alone, in those blanched expanses, might outlast—even for an instant—the very marsh plant it designated.

gulls, egrets, now, in growing numbers.

while, far out, stands of maritime pine as if floated—mirage-like—in bunched clusters.

felt yourself, as you went, thin to that spread estuary.

its last, scattered shacks: penultimate markers.

'a traced erasure,' you'd once called it. a semiotics, finally, without signs.

as the road, just under, broke, now, into gravel, rubble, dune.

impression, everywhere, of aftermath: of having entered, already, an afterworld; of muttering to yourself in some kind of after-language.

you, who'd chase yourself down, if you could, to your least,
legible vestige.

entering, as you went, those abolished alphabets.

just there, for instance, where they'd located—along the tidal
limits—traces of that lagoonal conglomerate: mounds *(taparas)* of
so much protohistoric habitat.

'pudding stone,' they'd called it.

or on tiny, offshore islands, the first, readily identifiable potsherds
of that incinerating culture: the urnfield.

wondered, didn't you, why the faintest residues elicited the
strongest responses? the most resonant?

delving, as you had, for echo.

for the parallel register(s) of some possible accompaniment.

where, within so much sounding—precise, punctual—might have
coincided (even for an instant) with that *terro sutile.*

(as the ground, otherwise, went on slipping from under).

mattered, didn't it, that—in approaching the coastline—that
very same, incised ceramic had gone from a clay tempered in quartz,
calcite, feldspar to one of crushed, glistening seashell.

—earth and artifact, so doing, in perfect symbiosis—

against those innate dispositions, would read—as you went—
your own, makeshift arrangements.

matching—as you did—precarities.

moving, now, no longer as a physical entity but so much scribble,
scratch-mark, pecking

as a broken phrase in search of its own complement.

words, now, nothing more than the solvent for other words: breath-tracking-breath across so much spectral landscape.

so many long-since fossilized sites.

even (in the rhetoric of latter-day archeology) 'fossilized waters.'

there where they'd settled, *terramaricoles,* at the mouth of the least creek, rivulet, watercourse.

mattered, too, that the lowest stratigraphic layer of human habitation could be determined, today, by whether or not the bivalves therein (cockles, mussels, clams, etc.) still ***happened to be hinged.***

or, occasionally, by an urn, still choked with crematory ash.

would, if you could, precede vestige.

reach, that is, far enough back that you might begin, finally, projecting forwards.

bearing—as you did—that open vocable.

as you traveled, now, well past the silence of those abandoned settlements (sacrificed, no doubt, circa -550, for the sake of the first, fortified cities to the west).

rendered derelict by an emergent, mercantile exchange system, undermining every form, now, of autonomous economy.

as you entered, just then, the *cami salinié*—the ancient salt route—past the last, lagoonal stations.

—visor lowered against so many flat, oncoming rays—

would, if you could, precede even the instant itself; by only
a syllable, only the living increment of a murmur.

(prolonged draft of one's own inaudibility).

as, either side, the vinerows went on ticking (dark, invisible
now) past the cracks in the car's windows.

usually stopped, didn't you, at one of those small, one-star
hotels along the outskirts as if the choice of place depended
—as with the word itself—on its very liminality.

for dinner, fried squid and a dry, white Minervois. moved, as
you went, at the exact same speed as whatever you'd happened to
assimilate.

within the rented space of that tiled bedroom (windowdoors the
same height as the room itself), sheer length of that fractured
reflection.

what wrapt, just now, about its very husk.

throughout the night, the occasional shouts, just beneath, of
passing bargemen.

echoing—syncretic—against the running silence of so much
antecedent.

traveling, as they did, down the long, die-strait corridor of that
antique canal: what lay, just now, beneath a high, over-hanging
canopy of dry, unrattling plane leaves.

where, only five kilometers lower, a Gallo-Roman epigraph had
been found dedicated to the god Mars by the boatmen and ship-
wrights of that very locality.

the inscription thereof, DEO. MARTI. AVG., leading, as it would,
to the discovery of Lattara: city lost—choked—in the alluvium
of the very watercourse it once abutted.

(what if you yourself came across the word—the words—by which you, too, might be decrypted?)

(could roam, pseudo-antiquarian, amongst so much interpolated vestige?).

"pity," as one archeologist put it, "that the site itself hadn't been ravaged by fire: the calcination that would have resulted might have preserved many of its artifacts against so much needless deterioration."

enough remained, nonetheless, within its hydromorphic subsoils, to distinguish eleven separate levels of habitation.

(at its very deepest, for instance, abundant evidence of *bucchero nero,* Etruscan blackware).

enough remained, that is, to determine the fact that Lattara had not only undermined those scattered, lagoonal stations but come to monopolize the entire territory in an embryonic attempt at colonization: at establishing, already, an oligarchic microstate.

characterized—most notably—by a "flourishing of ramparts."

by the first appearance, *intra muros,* of granaries: evidence, already, of a surplus production and its automatic corollary: the stocking of negotiables.

yes, already, concepts of deferral.

just as the phrase, that most invested of goods, would come to gather, provisionally, against its own diffusion.

clot, thesaural.

no way of evaluating the true worth of 'here,' you realized, without a thoroughgoing examination of its historical determinants.

without, for instance, measuring (as had the archeologists) the vast quantities of gravel, of paving stone the founders had first employed in consolidating the 'here'—for example—of this particular site.

(what would only add, centuries later, to its subsidence. like Ostia, its vanishing).

yes, here, just here, where horses, this morning, grazed immobile amongst the excavated substructures.

—that skeletal, pluricellular network of rectangles—

(punctuated, occasionally, by black cypress).

were you, you wondered (as you passed through the adjoining museum) any more substantial than the reflections you cast against the glass cases, filled with so much tagged salvage?

than that wafer-thin layer, glazing the surface of so many illegibles?

yes, would delve: delve if you could.

among the toponyms (those earliest, verbal particles), would follow the radical *Lat-*, signifying—in Celt—a bog or swampland as far as its suffix *-ara, -aris,* designating—in a lost, pre-Indo-European dialect—water, running water.

ur-words, of sort. *urspracht.*

those, that is, of an entire world—worlds—gone under: there, just there, as you stood at the fixed center of so much latter-day postulate.

so many vaporous substantives.

the rub of your own coat collar serving, occasionally, as reminder.

—or the jingle, just then, of your car keys—

fragrance, as you passed, of so many damp, rotting birch leaves.

as you took, now, the river valley northwards. retracing, as you did, the route (and, subsequently, the dialectic) which once existed between the protohistoric settlements along the coast (e.g., Lattara, Agatha, etc.) and the rich hinterlands, above.

between negotiant, that is, and producer.

following, no doubt, that "axis of penetration" which the first, itinerant bronzesmiths must have taken, vectors—initiators—of the new order.

rising, as you went, towards those abandoned *oppida*, perched on their rock outcrops.

Ensérune, Montlaurès, La Monadière.

(only visible, at that time of year, through a blizzard of amber, salmon, brass).

as a narrow footpath—taut with aleppo—as it drafted you upwards.

where, once again, you'd find them: the substructures. again and again, the human signature of so much right angle lying at the base of so many obliterated dwellings.

while the earth, a bit everywhere, oozed vestige.

oozed *dolia*.

unmistakable, the fragments of those immense, subterranean storage jars as they began appearing—a bit everywhere, now—in broad, scarcely baked, convex sections.

the very length, quite often, of a human collarbone.

shards that the archeologists had come to associate, chronologically, with the emergence of the earliest known battlements, watch towers, defense systems.

yes, once again, that "flourishing of ramparts."

at the very same moment, in fact, as the fortified cities along the coast: these sudden, rudimentary hill citadels.

at the dawn, that is, of a market economy (i.e., the first, deliberate production of an agrarian surplus and its subsequent conservation as a negotiable), these massive circumscriptions.

communities that—already—had begun gathering *against.*

as you, in a science of your own, would trace, if you could, the envelopment of the verb—of language itself—in a similar set of constrictions. self-enclosures.

how, against the innate radiance (call it *aura)* of a polyphonous diffusion, language—as well—would undergo a near identical circumscription.

find itself slowly, inexorably locked within the fixed perimeters of the literal.

(breath itself as if monetized).

yes, a process, a linguistic degeneration, you realized, long in coming: in the gradual attrition of so many sonorous particles.

for 'here' was never more than what a 'there' initiated.

than the ever-narrowing values placed upon language itself: an instrument, today, reduced to the inventorial. for each, specific item, nothing more—now—than its quick, correspondent code.

nothing more—in the spoliation of each, earthly good—than so much successive, electronic spasm.

had thinned as it went, hadn't it?

as you'd entered the very heart, now, of the cumulative; had nearly vanished—you realized—altogether.

you who'd sift substance—if you could—for sound. read, in the eloquence of so much rubble, in the cracked, terracotta skulls of so much vestige, traces of those lost vocables.

institute, in sort, an archeology of the polyphonous.

for you'd always assumed, as you went, an *âge d'or.* as nothing more, perhaps, than some psychic imperative: a underworld, still bristling with signifiers.

yes, would delve: annotate each, discrete echo.

just as others, for instance, would measure annual rainfall (as, indeed, they had) in the very midst of the Bronze Age.

calculate—down to the last millimeter—the otherwise obliterated.

unearthing (here at the Cayla de Mailhac, for instance) evidence of a virtually autonomous, self-sustaining culture. a "unity of civilization," as they'd called it, anteceding that of the first, surplus-oriented market economies, a century later.

towards the very end, that is, of the ephemeral urnfields (870-700 B.C.).

bronze, already, edging towards iron.

where, in their excavations, they'd discovered no dwelling larger than another; no sepulcher, richer.

a people who'd existed, no doubt, in the immensity of the immediate: in the very *there* of 'there.'

without a politic, that is, of deferral, of speculation against the eventual: a people who'd existed, no doubt, in the very glow of their own voices.

for the phrase only fails in failing to omit.

only fails in failing to distribute, *ipso facto,* its own, sonorous properties.

(radial, self-absolving).

there, just then, where another people—a warrior people—would arrive, now, bearing iron.

bearing the clanging axeheads of the new order.

and, from one year to the next (700 B.C.), the lovely, coiled, Mailhacian ceramic—incised, as it was, with a whole proto-alphabet of paired, echoing pictographs—would find itself replaced by that, now, of the thumb-slash.

by *those* of the thumb-slash.

and, along with them, the immediate hierarchization of social structures, the complexification of labor, and—inevitably—the sudden, spectacular emergence of market economies.

'almost ourselves,' you might have whispered, moving, just then, through the tall grasses, the grasses themselves still ticking with the very last crickets of autumn.

'almost ourselves,' you might have heard, reverberant.

a bit everywhere, now, screens, pails, the scuttled equipment of so much long-since abandoned excavation.

(turning, already, to vestige itself).

as you, existing as you did only an instant—a diaphanous moment—ahead of your own occlusion, made your way, now, through the narrow passage of so much sporadic murmur.

under, you'd insisted, but only for the sake of *through.*

only for the sake of resuscitating a language light, impalpable, diffuse as death itself.

one's very cells, therein, rendered weightless.

one's very breath—at last—as if ballasted in air.

while you stood there, that very instant, watching the sun—deep persimmon—set over the gutted necropolis.

and felt, so doing, the infallible contraction.

—the knot, knotting—

were there, you wondered, rooms, corridors, lobbies spacious enough to contain the immensity of so much empty speculation?

mirrors set at angles sufficiently congruous to catch the dark drafts of those vaporous reflections?

for the invisible—you knew—had all but vanished.

(gone, down the tall columns, unquoted).

you, who'd only written for the *wasn't,* only gutted the syllables for the sake of a certain *nothing,* moved now—as if impacted—within the mask of so much organ, nerve-end.

(so many self-replicating qualifiers).

catching glimpses, in the rearview, of that very self as you flicked, now, through the narrow, squat, stucco-fronted towns of the Minervois.

(felt, each time, the jolt of their tiny, humpbacked bridges).

Aigues-Vives, Cabezac, St. Marcel-sur-Aude.

traveling fast, now, beneath the vaulted ceilings of the sycamores:
their leaves, in the flooded yellow of your headlights, twice gold.

leaves, trees, the *richly irrigated plains* now of the Aude valley:
wasn't the breath itself for burning?

these very words—on that vaporous altar—for offering?

wasn't it thus, indeed, that we'd always proceeded? yielding
unto nothing, nothing again?

but the meats, you specified. but the chosen meats of our murmurs,
you insisted, for the sake of passage.

passage alone.

as you crossed, just then—planks rattling—the Canal de Robine.

(its waters skeined in the night's first fog).

and saw, only moments later, Narbonne as if floating—lavishly lit—
over its dark, parceled orchards.

—what, already, you entered now, ever initiate—

a dark concentration, in fact, of avenues, esplanades, restaurants,
their windows wrapt in blue neon.

your hotel bedroom itself like some station in space.

NARBO MARTIUS, you'd read.

in letters long as your own forearm and chiseled three centimeters
deep in limestone: yes, these, even these, to be blown—so many
open vocables—as if across.

yes, unto nothing, no one's, once again, *sleeve, wrist, fingers,* as if offered.

this very text, indeed, for its own unmaking.

for 'wasn't it thus,' as you'd written, 'we'd always proceeded?' in nourishing that very vacuum, subsisted?

charged—as we are—by our own releases?

yes, even here, where nothing happens, happens—indeed—over and over.

wind, that very instant, catching in the loose muslins.

the whole room, in fact, swelling with air.

as you stood, now, in the very space that your phrase—only an instant earlier—had vacated.

. . .the waxed floortiles, before you, glistening. . .

MICHEL BULTEAU

BLACK

(Tr. from the French
by Shelley Stroupe)

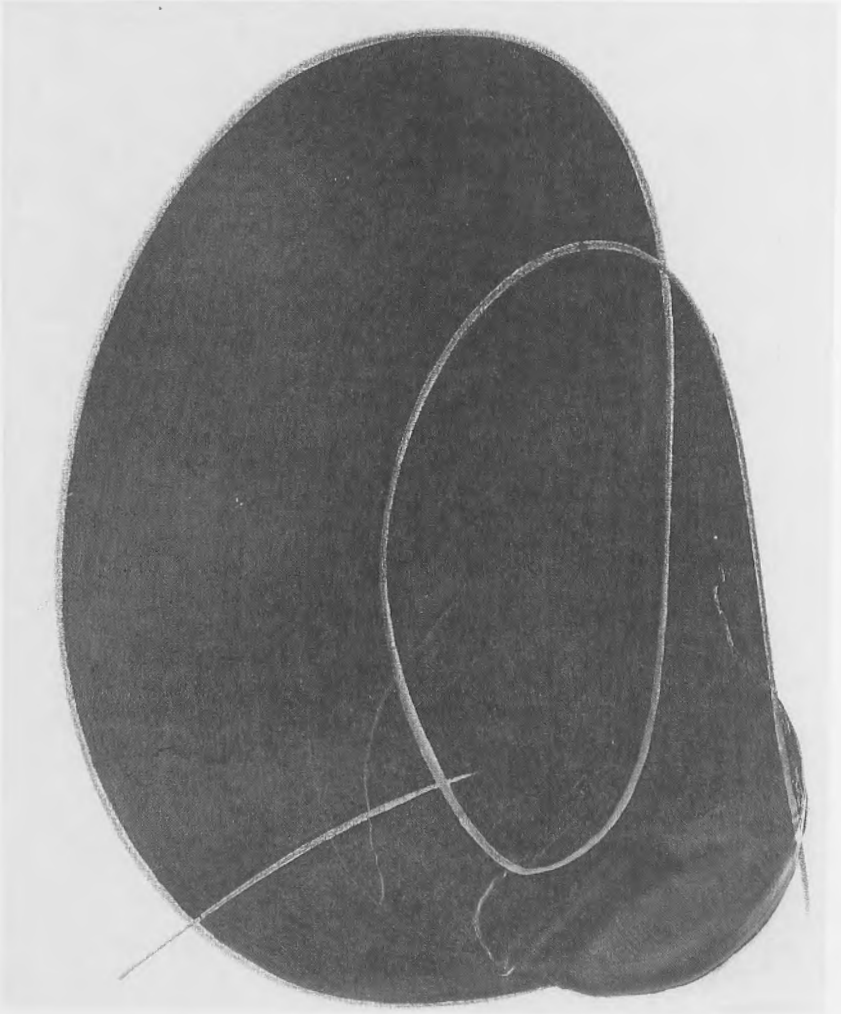
Has everything really gone black?
The eye hasn't gone black. It was black to begin with. The eye is a part of the body, a white egg. Its vision does not calm things. It sharpens the enigma.
The mind is the finger that moves.
The mind is the thorax.
The mind is the perfect organization of the body.
The movement is imperceptible. It is curious. It turns a little. It looks at itself and brushes against itself. But it remains mind and pointing finger, mind and thorax.
Black is seen and has trouble accepting immobility. It grows accustomed to the circle out of concern for dependence. Black dreads extremities. It likes to be in the indivisible center of origin.
Black encourages clandestine exchange (a sick lung for a flow of paint). Interior for interior. Black distances the red interior, the colors of butchery, the amazing caprices of blood. Black restores balm to the body.
The eye casts from the eye that which is lacking in the world, for it not to remain invisible.
As we were saying, it is on the inside that the work to come leaves traces. The eye of the seer sets up a give and take between the center and the periphery, oh long-legged Mallarméan spider. Center-exciter opening the eyes which henceforth look upon it.
Windows, space is within you! In your frames, your sashes.
Points touched by the fallible.
The outside becomes the soul.
To glimpse the lyrical constitution of the universe.
Hands have pushed on the real, hands which cross regions of

sightless experience, dig through cavities and turn viscera inside out like gloves.
The return to black has the merit of keeping viscera at a distance.
A skin has not formed, black relives the life of black, makes fun of itself, does not complete its ideas. Suddenly, black was no longer poison. Black follows the ridges of the die and surrenders to the sacred.
Here, somnolent animation is conveyed by the egg with the broken shell, the passage of black time, the dormant masses.
This egg, this time, these masses perturb the sessions of imitation, bearing witness to nightmares of axial lines and to the recognition of these nightmares.
The regard, conquered, no longer uses confused terms. Black peremptorily penciled, caring for the canvas, curing mystical interpretations. An attempt to thaw immobile logic, the logic of slow motion grinding to a halt.
Black surpassed.
Strangenesses?
Yes, pure and simple.
Black at the height of unreason, without slipping, seeking air like a fish, unstable treasure unable to speak, immanent black revealing postures, return of the open eyelid, path of successive realities, lacks and night watches.

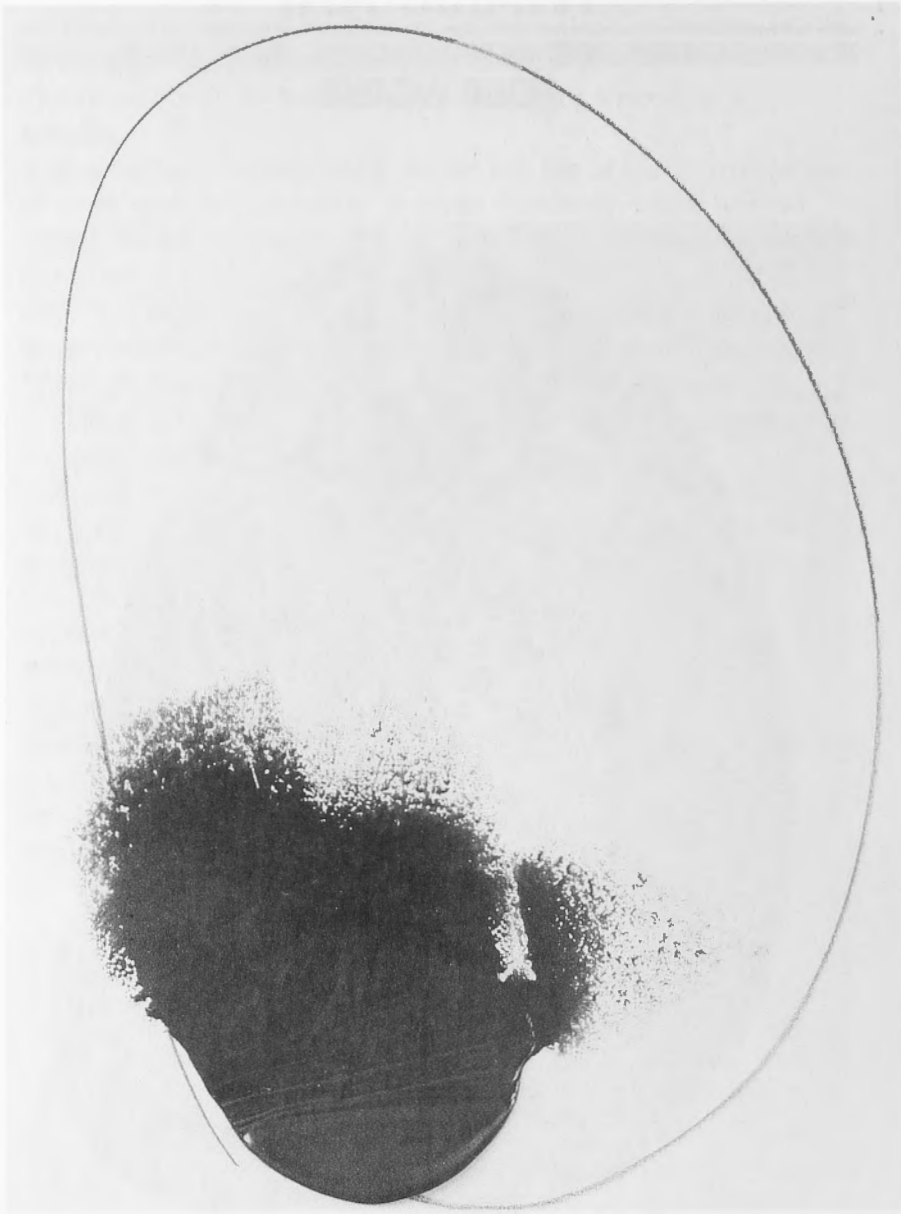
Note: "Black" first appeared, in French, as "Noir," in a catalogue otherwise devoted to Matsutani's work published by Galerie Mercuri in Paris, 1995.

MATSUTANI

FOUR WORKS

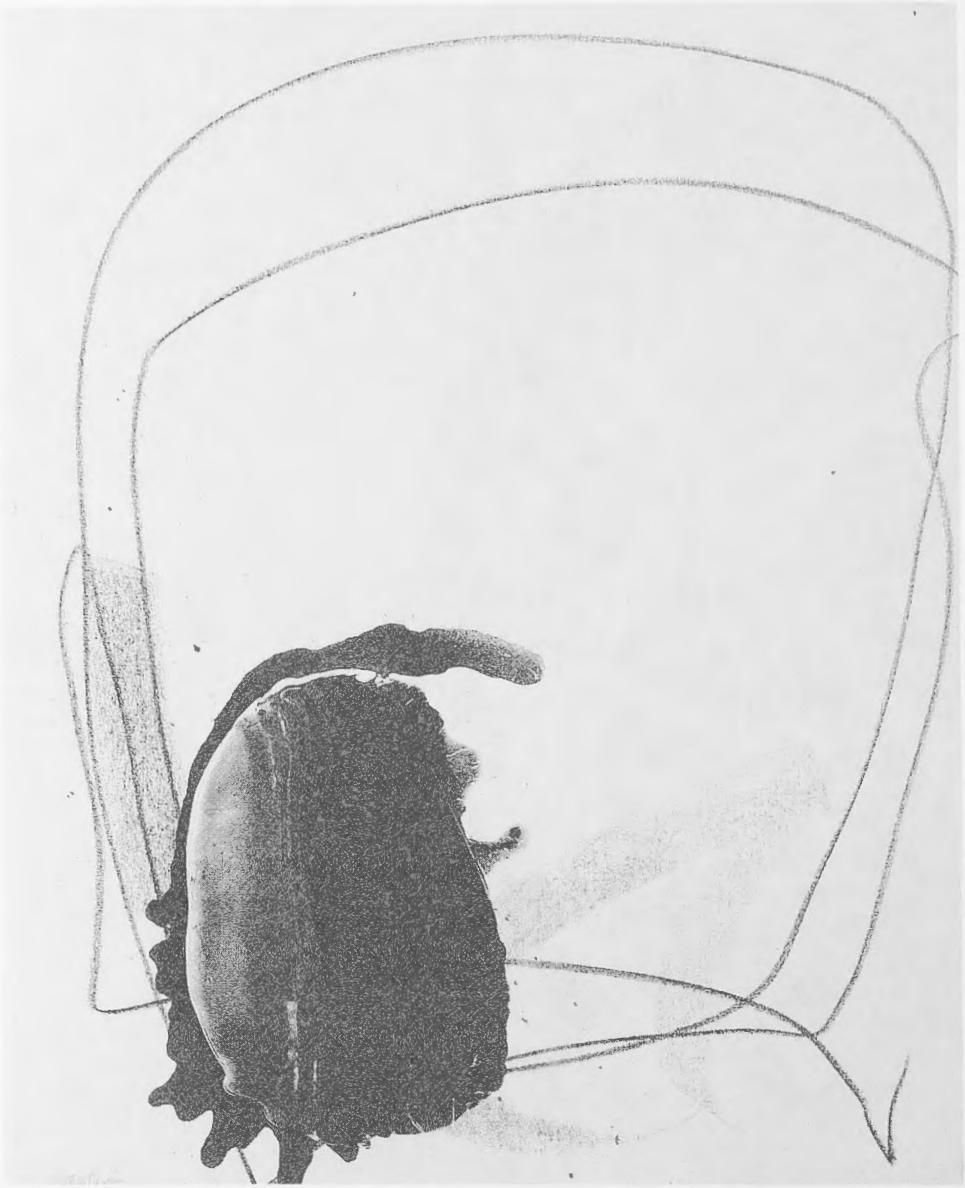


Cercle 94-8
1994, 65 x 64 cm, graphite, paper mounted on canvas, vinyl relief.



Cercle 95-3
1995, 116 x 89 cm, graphite, paper mounted on canvas, vinyl relief.

Ecriture 91-2
1991, 162 x 130 cm, graphite,
paper mounted on canvas, vinyl relief.



Cercle 94-9-8
92 x 73 cm, graphite, paper mounted on canvas, vinyl relief.

The Matter of Writing: On Pierre Guyotat

In 1969, *Tel Quel* published an extract from Pierre Guyotat's work in progress, *Éden, Éden, Éden,* under the title *Bordels boucherie.* After the book's publication by Gallimard in 1970, it was subjected to governmental censorship, was reviled by large sections of the Parisian literary establishment, and became one of the great divisive scandals of postwar French writing. The participants of *Tel Quel,* in collaboration with supporters and associates of Pierre Guyotat, such as Paule Thévenin, the editor of the work of Antonin Artaud, mounted a defence of the book. Michel Foucault wrote: 'Guyotat has written a book in a language of startling innovation. I have never read anything like it in any stream of literature. No-one has ever spoken as he speaks here.' Documents and interviews relating to this protest against the forbidding of writing were published in a volume entitled *Littérature Interdite.* This paper aims firstly to explore the process by which the language of *Éden, Éden, Éden* generated such institutional and individual vitriol, secondly to stress the role of *Tel Quel* in manifesting the language of this book, and thirdly to relate Guyotat's language to the configuration of contemporary Europe, and the pressures of fragmentation operating in any creative work brought into existence in the extreme conditions for which Guyotat's work delivers *prescience* and *testimony.* In this context of the contemporary, two elements need to be emphasized. Firstly, the English are in for a shock of their own, since *Éden, Éden, Éden* is to be published for the first time in English translation next month by Creation Books, in an extraordinarily veracious and compelling translation by Graham Fox. Secondly, Pierre Guyotat is very much alive and *present* in France, working on a colossal project for future publication, a project which has consumed him obsessively since the late 1970s and which came close to causing his death at the end of 1981. [And Guyotat will shortly be visiting London to give what I think will be a unique, once-in-a-lifetime

Delivered at the Tel Quel conference, London French Institute, 1995

performance, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on April the 27th.] So, I want to make it clear that I'm not talking about a *carcass* or about a *dead language* here.

Pierre Guyotat's 1988 text *Wanted Female* was conceived while he was jogging on the beach in Santa Monica while on a visit to see the painter Sam Francis. Guyotat saw a girl junkie running down the beach to buy crack from her dealer, and the image for this text was *sprung*: a girl is caught inside the cheek of the bestial narrator of the text along with six macerated sexes. The disciplined rhythm of *Wanted Female* is that of the process of *running*, its trajectory jump-cutting with invasive imageries, until the running of the text is suspended and all that remains are the ashes of the narrator, grabbed and gathered in a sack by the girl junkie, open and noxious. By contrast, the speed of *Éden, Éden, Éden* is that of an atrocious headlong rush into obscenity, conducted at breakneck intensity, disciplined to the last syllable. The text is not left to breathe, and it constricts the reader, exhausts the reader in an adrenalized pulse of text, whose release is exhalation amalgamated with exhaustion, with the great malignant orgasm which the entire book constitutes. No space exists in the text for the readers to pacify themselves, to focus and thereby rest their eyes. The onrush of text is itself an ocular violation. *Éden, Éden, Éden* is a text that compels the eye, physically, into its implosive momentum, that accelerates incessantly at the reader. In an interview published in *Tel Quel*, Guyotat spoke of how the text of *Éden, Éden, Éden* terminates at the same point where his van had broken down, in the steppes around the border between Algeria and Niger, during his obsessional travels around the area. He comments: 'I write like I travel—I write like I drive, even.' So, the brutality of raw speed is the first primary element in the transmission of the matter of writing.

Pierre Guyotat has written that his monumental work in progress, as yet unpublished, *L'Histoire de Samora Machel*, makes up what he calls 'the total prostitutional experience.' *Éden, Éden, Éden* consists of the *fragmentation* of prostitution; the book forms the relentless enumeration of an *innumerable* series of sex acts performed between prostitute boys and manual salaried workers in a desert brothel in Algeria; the final section of the book, compacting the detail of fauna with the detail of sex acts between a group of nomadic human beings and animals, takes place on a steppe in northern Niger; the text is initiated in warfare, with multiple acts of violence, rape and massacre perpetrated by marauding French troops, in a colonial conflict for which the index is the Algerian war of liberation, previously incised by Guyotat in his first celebrated novel, *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats*. It has to be noted in this context that Guyotat was himself a young soldier in Algeria, arrested for inciting other soldiers to desert, imprisoned and shat upon for three months in a hole in the ground,

and threatened with death. Each fragment of the sex acts performed by Guyotat's prostitute boys, Wazzag and Khamssieh, is saturated with the murderous opening of the text, which determines that every act of lust is read—indelibly, with vicious clarity—through the *medium* of a hanging pall of blood. The salaried sexual act doubles the salaried act of exploitation undergone by the drillers, workers, butchers who enter the arena of prostitution. And the régime of sex is doubled by the régime of genocide.

At the time of the writing of *Éden, Éden, Éden* and the appearance of *Bordels boucherie* in *Tel Quel,* Guyotat had not yet completely formulated his project of recreating what he calls 'the matter of writing,' a project which consumes him to the present day. This project was most intensively developed in the aftermath of the scandal over *Éden, Éden, Éden,* in the years from 1971, when Guyotat was closely aligned with the French Communist Party, to 1975, when he began to mainline heroin for the first time and published his most dense and syntactically damaged and elided work, the novel entitled *Prostitution.* The texts which Guyotat worked on in these years are what he calls: 'liberated texts.' The act of creation which produced *Éden, Éden, Éden,* then, is the pivot upon which this work *under the skin of the French language* delicately *grates* in all its originality. Guyotat states: 'The very origin of the whole system of literature has to be attacked.' The crucial question, then, is to formulate another, oppositional origin, that of the matter of writing, the site at which it cuts with a stultified system—and then to locate *Éden* within the process which that reinvented origin generated. So—as Pierre Guyotat states in his seminal text of the early 1970s, *The Language of the Body,* delivered at a celebrated conference on the work of Artaud, his work began as a child, with vital corporeal matters to be combined in language. He notes how he wrote incessantly from an early age, masturbating constantly with one hand while he wrote with his other hand, producing manuscripts which are extraordinary visual coagulations of semen, ink, blood and dirt. The matter of language originates in obsession, the intensity of fluidic trajectories and mixings, and through the fragments that cohere to that *surface* of the work which is *publicly presented* to the eye. In all of Guyotat's writing, only a fraction of that work of textual ejaculation has ever been presented to the public eye, and the remainder is either lost in the jet of its trajectory, or retained in the body of Guyotat's work which he has determinedly kept for himself. It must be noted, however, that Guyotat's *latent* work is *accessible*—stored at the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine in Paris in manuscript form, and open to being actively sought and minutely interrogated, rather then chanced upon.

The matter of writing, then, begins in *expulsion and incorporation.* As such, a book such as *Éden, Éden, Éden* is *the perfect book* for contemporary Europe, which is also, in its malignancy, dominated by those *twin*

compulsions. The gestation of *Éden* involved a concurrent *detachment* from Europe and its oppositional re-*integration.* In the period after the publication of *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats,* Guyotat returned to Algeria, and travelled through the desert and mountain regions in the south of the country, photographing and filming the landscape and nomadic people, making notes towards his *dispossession* of language—the dispossession of the French language *from* itself—which the writing of *Éden* would project. The book was then written in a sudden burst of six months in a concrete highrise in the desolate suburbs of southern Paris, in the winter following the May 1968 events in the city. The construction of the matter of writing, then, subsumes the protraction of gazing, travelling and noting, *into* the abrupt intensity of the executed text. The oscillation here is that of the greatest of all the contradictions of representation, that between *repetition* and unique *projection* or *demonstration.* Roland Barthes wrote in his preface to *Éden* of how the *unit of the phrase* in Guyotat's language is endlessly brought to bear, compulsively and relentlessly, against the preoccupations of the text. The substance of the subject matter is never attained, never fulfilled. The uniqueness of the language in *Éden,* which Michel Foucault emphasizes, is unique only through its sustaining, its determined rhythm of repetition. If the text visually enacts an ocular violation, then the impact upon the reader of that repetition of intensity would constitute a *mental* violation of the most challenging kind, since what it aims at is the barrier between language and the human body. At the end of the work of Antonin Artaud, this terminal contradiction, between repetition and uniqueness, is vitally at stake. After giving what would be his final performance, at the Galerie Pierre in Paris on the 18th of July, 1947, Artaud wrote of the language of gestures and blows which he had formulated and had attempted to demonstrate to his audience, but the *presence* of which had finally eluded him in terms of the kind of *immediacy of repetition* which he wanted to project. Artaud commented: 'I would have had to *shit* blood through my navel to arrive at what I want./For example, three quarters of an hour's beating with a poker on the same spot. . .'. The diverse notes which Artaud made for his final work, the banned recording for radio, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu,* also conglomerate around this concern to demonstrate the unique, while refusing the representational as integrally malicious, complicit and *social.* And the strategy of repetition of Guyotat's *Éden, Éden, Éden* is of a parallel order, in its exploration of the tension between the sustained and the immediate in language, working as the direct counterpart for corporeal processes of resistance and creation.

The matter of writing, then, would ultimately be something which brings *abstraction,* and even the integral *repetition* of language itself, to its end, to its silencing. In retrospect, in 1995, Pierre Guyotat views his

trajectory with *Tel Quel* as one which assisted in, and added to, the project of expelling *abstraction* out from the contemporary, and of focusing on the immediately gestural and physical. In viewing the historical scope and resonance of Guyotat's work, the two overriding elements to be discerned are what he calls 'the revolt against abstraction,' and, secondly, this permanent struggle with the matter of repetition. Long before the powerful rise of fundamentalism in Algeria in 1991, Guyotat warned that this systematic abstraction of religion, into a movement of mass terror, on a sustained scale, was the greatest danger for the North African countries. And it's certainly the case that one of the great fallacies about European history, in the second half of the twentieth century, was that the genocide enacted in the Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War would *not be repeated.* At least in Britain, the television imageries of Omarska in the summer of 1992 constituted a disabusal of that fallacy about repetition. Similarly, the arguably genocidal extermination of one hundred thousand Kurdish and Iraqi conscripts, by European and North American weapons technology, in the deserts of southern Iraq in February 1991, *resuscitated* the atrocious dynamics of power that had animated the particular conflict, that of Algeria, which *initiates* the language of Guyotat's *Éden* and of *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats.* The latter of these books is explicitly dedicated by Guyotat to his uncle, Hubert, arrested for resistance activities and killed in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp at Oranienburg in 1943. Guyotat has written: 'My whole imaginary system is an allusion to the concentrational system.' The twin forces of abstraction and repetition are eminently *palatable and consumable* in the contemporary media. And, as at the time of the publication of *Éden,* it is the crucial dynamics of a *refused abstraction*—and of a *fury at repetition*—which Pierre Guyotat's work in progress also now confronts, and in which it affronts.

Éden, Éden, Éden is demonstrative and revelatory in its insight into the crucial and determining matters of *sex, language and the human body.* The work is lethal, and it possesses no precedent. It possesses one or two siblings, however. Like Antonin Artaud, Guyotat views the act of writing as a physical secretion—a feral exudation of the body's material, creatively expectorating deadly substances which are savage and interrogative in their visceral impact upon the exposed reader. If the essence of language is to subsist and repeat itself in a state of stasis, then Pierre Guyotat has relentlessly beaten this comatose, catatonic *nature* of language into an anatomical matter of writing. Like Artaud in his final work from the late 1940s, Guyotat speaks with blunt and sensational desire, against the apparition of society and its paralysed languages. The action of writing, in *Éden, Éden, Éden,* becomes a disciplined intervention which cracks censorship wide open in all its horror. The pressure of the horror of the act of writing is maximal when placed intimately against the horror of the

forbidden. Then the matter of writing is a liberating project: the tamacheck text at the opening of *Éden, Éden, Éden* reads: '*And now, we are no longer slaves.*' But it must be emphasized that the forbidden is an entirely different matter now than it was in 1970. The support which *Tel Quel* gave to Guyotat and his texts, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, is certainly a factor in the transformation of the forbidden, and the transformation of censorship. The subject matter and focus of censorship have been comprehensively recast in those twenty-five years, and the strategies of censorship have arguably evolved, in terms both of their sophistication and their brutality, for example in the action by the Artaud heirs against Philippe Sollers and *l'Infini*, last year. And Pierre Guyotat writes: Censorship is condemned to have much more work with my *new* texts than with the first ones.' But the fact of refusing censorship—refusing its central operation of suppressing an *upheaval* in re-imagining sex and the human body, in re-imagining language—is enduringly valuable. The traces of this process are marked in the survival of *Éden, Éden, Éden* and in the role of *Tel Quel* in that survival.

The question of censorship is one which Pierre Guyotat has never failed to confront, as evidenced in his defence, in the newspaper *Libération*, last March, of Jacques Henric and his novel *L'Origine du monde*, and evidenced too in his earlier defence of Salman Rushdie and his novel *The Satanic Verses*. And from Guyotat's first words, the will to *avoid the erotic*, to *embrace the pornographic*, has been pronounced—the pornographic placed clearly in the sense of what disturbs, deranges and liberates the limits of the body, what sensationally overturns and also *transfixes* the eye, what falls irrevocably into the substance of the body, and what castigates the imageries of a bogus society. Guyotat has commented: 'Pornography is certainly more beautiful than eroticism. I say three cheers for pornography!' The intervening ground between Guyotat's realignment of language in *Éden, Éden, Éden* (accused *governmentally* of being pornographic in the years between 1970 and 1981), and the pornography of censorship itself, is a *terrain of silence*, and this terrain is one Guyotat has explored to the point where his silence alone has proved atrociously articulate. If writers are only writers when they publish work, then those intermittances and intrusions of silence or social retraction have been determining in Pierre Guyotat's work. At periods such as that of the summer of 1977, in which he conceived his most monstrous abjection of language, his novel *Le Livre*, the constitution of the identity of the writer is interrogated with violence. Guyotat retrospectively wrote: 'At the same time that I decide never again to publish, reinforced by my refusal of the designation "writer," these voices [of mine] disappear into what I no longer call writings, but *matter*.' Silence and obscenity are equally at the heart of the matter of writing. This oscillation between the forced silence of censorship, and the

intentional silence of extreme creativity, is initiated from fury and from aberration. It is simultaneously the silence of humiliation and of reaction, the silence of degradation and liberation. And that is the unique and unbearable silence of Guyotat's matter of writing, the traces of which are *uncollectable*, and virulent to the touch of the eyes.

The text of *Éden, Éden, Éden* is ferociously lit and coloured. It is a text that is concurrently an image in space, an image in which no time is ever lost: the movement between prostitutional act to act is instantaneous, utterly without gaps in its temporal representation. Guyotat has commented that he always possesses a pictorial and visual, rather than linguistic, sense of what he is doing. In the act of writing, the weight of the accumulated and assembled words have no substance or *matter*; instead, it is the *image* which causes a detonation in the movement and the abrupt choreography of language. As in the notebooks of Antonin Artaud, the border between image and text in *Éden, Éden, Éden* is summarily precluded, *negated* by the creative act which incorporates the visual and the textual, into a corporeal and assaultive matter. And finally, the text of *Éden, Éden, Éden* is a language of the body. For Guyotat, the responsibility to write is paramount in its intensely political, intensely social configuration of *resistance*—a configuration of revolution in its momentary, and thereby momentous, intersection with the trajectory of *Tel Quel*. But, at the same time, the *origin* of that responsibility is *exterior* to all forms which enclose it, including the collective identity of *Tel Quel*, and even the individual identity of Pierre Guyotat himself, who has commented: 'I have written these things, but it wasn't *I* who wrote them. I am the instrument of that writing. I am a body through whom the words pass.' The body, then, is the instrument which hammers into, or else lets slip, language. It is the body which may disobey, rather than its words. But the body is *all there is* between language and the void of censorship or fundamentalism or genocide.

The origin of the matter of writing, then, is in its revelation of duplicity between language and the body, and in the shattering act of collision which also welds them together.

—STEPHEN BARBER

Paul Celan, *Breathturn*. (Bilingual edition). Translated from the German and with an Introduction by Pierre Joris. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1995.

Pierre Joris's translations of *Atemwende* were made over a period of seventeen years: how persistent does a translator have to get? Meanwhile, even before Celan's suicide in 1970, there had been the pioneering translations by Cid Corman, Michael Hamburger, Joachim Neugroschel and others. There had also been a wave, cresting in about 1976, of brilliant studies commenting on the original cryptic poems,
early or late, exegetic micro-analyses, themselves abstruse, of some of the most obscure writings since Mallarmé to have been academically classified as fresh growths in the Gongora tradition. Even then, what is it all about? Exegetes have certainly "confiscated" Celan, but his poems still stick, barbed, actual and enigmatic, in the imaginations of poets and connoisseurs around the globe: a poetry as utterly remote from the sprawling, bland or strident, linearity of "open mike" confessions as Charles Köchlin's piano is from that of Keith Jarrett.

Pierre Joris's introduction to his bilingual and annotated *Breathturn* clears a shining path through the thicket of critical opinion which has been gathering around Celan since the mid-1960s. Recently, both biographical and intellectual contexts have been clarified for English-language readers, first by Jerry Glenn, now by Amy Colin *(Holograms of Darkness,* 1991) and John Felstiner *(Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew,* 1995). Much that has been hidden has been revealed in these two books: Celan's origins in Czernovitz, his literary and social antecedents, his beginnings as a poet, his identification (deepened by translation) with other poets, Essenin for one, but much more fundamentally Mandelstam, his paranoia (above and beyond the appalling *contretemps* with Claire Goll), his alliance with Henri Michaux. Other aspects come to the fore in Celan's correspondence with Nelly Sachs, the translation of which was published by Sheep Meadow: Nelly Sachs (1886-1970), whose splendid later poems were, surely, inspired by her feeling for Celan, died only a few months after his suicide.—But is Paul Celan, the poet alone, such a Titan? Do his "polyperspectival" later poems (beginning 1963) actually speak, or is this some Vygotskyan "inner speech," in a series of oracles tortuously pronounced from what Celan himself called "word-caves"? Inevitably the time will come when his writings, their significance hitherto magnified by minute analysis of words and figures ceremoniously conducted by priest-exegetes, might be taken from their pedestal. Will Pierre Joris's translations advance at least North American understanding of the originals? To what degree can real

understanding be advanced by translation of poems that crack words to expose their kernels, to which the poet then points as with his needle, only to end up showing the atomic fabric of the needle's point and how it holds together in its vacuum?

These are not impertinent questions. But since they arise from some anxiety I experience when reading Celan, and beholding the immense thicket of exegesis around his work, let me now set down, *à propos* these translations, not pressing them hard, some fractious thoughts to which they have led me. First I should quote one translation from the first (serially composed) section of *Breathturn:*

> YOUR DREAM, butting from the watch.
> With the wordspoor carved
> twelve times
> helically into its
> horn.
>
> The last butt it delivers.
>
> In the ver-
> tical narrow
> daygorge, the upward
> poling ferry:
>
> It carries
> sore readings over.

A note on "horn" says: "A possible reference to the 'Gate of Horn' which according to Homer leads to the true dreams" (*Odyssey* 19, 562–569). There is no note on "butt," which translates "Stoß" ("butting" from "stößig"). Both "horn" and "butt" belong in a context which, in the original, is fluid, and is inevitably fixed in translation by the interpretation put on the words by the translator. ("Helically" translates "schraubenförmig," literally "screw-shaped.") The trouble is with "butt," which suggests in English a context alien to the German. If we could have divined (and translation entails divination here) that the horn is that of a unicorn (a recurrent figure in Celan), "butt" would hardly be apt—and the "Gate of Horn" association would not be "possible" at all. Yet other words and other contexts conspire here in such a manner as to put the unicorn in a very dark abyss indeed. What can "Wundgelesenes" mean? "Sore readings" does not, I think, capture the sense of *read till sore / wounded,* which might be the outcome of being pierced by the horn of a unicorn of a purity only to be desired of poetry. One salient feature of these texts is the compound word, noun or

adjective or both. Celan was splitting German words and splicing particles—inventing his own language, as border peoples and outlaws always have done. "Pfingstschneise," for instance, suggesting "Pentecost (fire) break," translated by Joris as "Pentecost lane." The words may communicate strangely with one another, kernel to kernel, but is there a "what" for them to communicate to their reader? The fluidity of context is only one function in a general disturbance of expectations.

As for contexts, there arises the problem of Celan's multiple literary allusions, echoes carried into his poems from literary sources he adopted. The earlier poem "Matière de Bretagne," for instance, "alludes" to the Arthurian legends, "Engführung" ("Stretto") to a poem by C.F. Meyer, Dante's Paolo and Francesca story, and Democritus—all in a matter of instants. But the allusions are, as it were, glancing echoes only: of the Democritus fragment "All that exists is atoms, the rest is opinion," only "war Meinung" remains. How can any extraneous context be felt as presence, if it is not transformed, made new, and branded into the structure of the poem which takes it up? And if not felt as presence, working its own transformation in its new home, the allusion is no more than a matter of concern for meticulous exegetes; for translators, such difficulty will be plain.

Is it possible (I have wondered, as devil's advocate) that, notwithstanding Celan's real poetic genius facing full into the "language of the murderers," his stature has been fabricated by exegetes, who want nothing better than to hunt for hidden treasure? Celan was, himself, more than touchy about recrudescent German (or other) anti-Semitism, ultra-sensitive to any adverse criticism of his work. It might almost seem that, out of an unavowed bad conscience, reverential German-language critics have, while turning Celan into an inscrutable *icon,* deified him as a poet of infallible omniscience, by way of expiation: first you crucify, then you deify. Much of the unquestioning interpretation of Celan's poems might be underpinned by some idolatrous compulsion. Even exquisitely refined exegetes have attributed to poems intricacies not at all warranted by the texts as such—for instance, the grand debate (summarized in Colin's book) about the poem "Zähle die Mandeln," which, because it speaks of "entering into your name," and although there's no intrinsic evidence at all, is alleged to have something to do with Osip Mandelstam.

After all, Celan's entire work is a unique record of a wound, a trauma. Unlike most of his contemporaries (non-German likewise), he made of his radically disconcerting trauma a poetry of "spiritual" experience. The poem becomes an articulation of a stage on a spiritual quest. His quest was to purge the evil which had wounded him. A Sisyphus, he never succeeded, or else he did succeed by so steadfastly failing to accomplish the

impossible, always undaunted, telling what evil does to you, how it will not be expunged. A catharsis did perhaps occur, once or twice (e.g. in "Engführung," as a dialogue *cum mortuis);* yet still the wound festered ("Matière de Bretagne"), the evil even renews itself at each wrenching effort to pluck it out by putting it to words. The "idolatry" of the exegetes must, surely, imply a recognition of this difference between Celan and most other poets, and of the weird kinship between Celan and Nelly Sachs, as poets of spiritual questing in the wake of the Holocaust.

Possibly, too, for a number of admirers and epigones, Celan voices their obscure feeling of victimhood. In one way or another, the poems ventilate variations of that feeling, so their maker, himself captive to the victim nightmare, himself a survivor suspended in pestilential mineshafts of melancholy, has come to seem like a Prometheus, molding from subterraneous clay and human tears lingo-beings in his image and theirs. Here, then, is the language of the threatened and the pulverized: the "particle cloud" ("Partikelgestöber") on the brink of silence, a lingo composed of words imaginatively vaporized, then reconstituted, but "unrecuperable," particles blent afresh by recourse to cross-linguistic puns, to cognates in "technical vocabularies" (crystallography, navigation, etc.), to neologisms, such as "Porenbau," "Lichtzwang," or "Pfingstschneise" (with its choking center of eight successive consonants). One is certainly reminded of Michel Leiris and his idea of a "scrambled language" of gasps and gaps, which, as a "disjointed, dislocated, danced rather than devoutly dressed-up discourse," might help one "to feel less wholly disoriented before that NOTHING". . .so that "the horror of future annihilation, still noxious but now more diffused, is drawn out of its diabolically imperceptible nullity thanks to the illusion of a bridge linguistically suspended." (J. Clifford's translation, from *Words/Swerves,* in *Sulfur* 15).

Celan's translators are unanimously nonplused. How do you make credible in English the extended qualifier-plus-noun phrasing that stretches even German usage? "Over three in sea- / drunken sleep / with brownalgae-blood / ciphered breast- / nipplestones // clap your / from the last / raincord breaking / loose sky. . ." Such chains may (with hyperbaton) so prolong the protasis of a period that the apodosis withers on the stem. All this and more, from the murderers' language must be extracted another and magically cosmogonic word, while even that is witnessed, in position, as a word about a word. No preconceived "world" being "represented," the word (in German, *Wort* is a *seme* with great latent power in the act of *saying)* creates one of its own. But does it? Can a language be so "suspended," so devised by deregularization, that a transcendent alternative tongue comes to be constituted? And in translation—accidents occur: "raincord breaking" is so close to "record breaking," a platitude with no trace in the original puts a wrong spin on the code.

I do not think that Celan could have achieved what his poetics eccentrically projected without jumping over his shadow. That shadow is the one which hounds the Narcissistic personality, obstructs the incessantly self-reflexive, tortuously pain-propelled imagination, and pre-vents (in the old sense of "going before") any airy creation of words. Or else the shadow baffles imagination (and not only in the "mirror-stage"), so that the project culminates in a splintering, or hashing, of its obstacle, the *given* language. Celan's later procedure seems to have been to decompose the given and recompose particles of it in sequences of fairly short poems, which, though they may send luminous detail splitting off across a serial pattern to suggest a semantic coherence, in cryptic transformations peculiar to the sequence, actually eliminate any extrinsic context (in Piaget's terms). The effect, then, is agglutination, rather than coherence, or, as Vygotsky said of "inner speech," the sequence becomes a "function in itself" and is "not the internal aspect of external speech" (*Thought and Language* (1934), 1962, p. 149). The reader, of German or English, will perhaps be more favorably disposed if he or she can conceive of such poems (or translations) not as voicing but as writing. For me, any such disjunction is not thinkable: the poetic ardor backfires if committed to Babel. Reading Pierre Joris's often most valiant translations, I was reminded of a passage in Gottfried Keller's novel, *Der grüne Heinrich*, the early version (1840s), where the hero asserts: "Gott strahlt vor Weltlichkeit": "God is radiant with worldliness." Celan's endeavor was to overturn that insight together with the whole *harmonia mundi* topology enshrined in it.

The world as he knew it is anything but a vast *theotrope*. Yet he does smuggle the *numen* back in through the cracks, oddly enough, as cosmogonic word which represents only itself and thus remains *deus absconditus*. (To Nelly Sachs's avowal of her faith, he replied: "I will continue to blaspheme.") In every poem he wrote there is a recall to order of the privileged lyric word, as an aspiration, at the very least, toward a sacred, even sacrificial language. Yet our comfortable debates about poetry and shamanizing might find in Celan's life-work a shocking version of their object: Ten years (1945-55) of high-absurd figurative poems, euphonious, oneiric, in soft or sharp focus, always wrestling with demons of evil and oppression; then fifteen years of restless effort to articulate a vision (complete, because ever onward going—the Mallarmé prescription), but amid worsening atmospheres and spikier particles, on an ever-diminishing psychic scale; until the vision itself brings the shaman to vanishing point. In his last three collections, it seems to me, there is more and more manner, less and less character. More and more, as a trueblue Mannerist, Celan was "overrunning the classical norm" (as Ernst Robert Curtius described Mannerist tendencies); he was also eliminating, as far as it is speakable,

extrinsic contexts upon which, alas, civil semantics depend for any "give and take" between the fibers in our networks of personal pronouns.

Might this be why I miss, as regards "voicing" and "writing," in Celan's later work any undisconcerted, individual, "human" voice? Compared (invidiously or not) with the voices of Mandelstam, Celan's voices are those of an eccentric transformer of the ultramundane voices that sound echoing across the centuries of German lyric; but isn't an individual human voice, solo or orchestral, the missing *bond* among his particles? It is as if, in a manic contest with language as such (not only German), Celan's Orphic head, separated from his experiential body, went whirling and spluttering down the Hebrus. (Simon Perchik's elegiac "Seven Poems" in the recent *Shearsman* (No. 24) could be studied for the desirable "real" voice that speaks in them, a voice capable of down-to-earthliness, of compassion, of comedy, of resonant psychic insight—yet still dialoguing with the dead.)

Enough. Voice being a paramount and principal feature of "lyric," how come Celan's interpreters have generally neglected vocal aspects of his work—pitch, duration, volume, timbre, intonation, overtones, and the rest? So intent have they been on deciphering the oracles and fathoming the poetics inscribed in them, that his precious, plaintive tenor, sometimes breathless, never passionless, sometimes stilted, sometimes whining—the voices of his first four or five books—hardly receives a hearing. Do Pierre Joris's translations render anything like the tonalities, timbres, registers, of the originals? Could any translations be expected to? Recent Rilke translations, those by Mitchell and Snow, for instance, do nothing or little with Rilke's vocal qualities. Pierre Joris, with Celan's, could probably not do more than he has done. There are some splendors, though. Here is one which avoids babble and pitfall, cacophony and vocalic confusion, far better than some others:

HALF-GNAWED, mask-
miened corbel stone,
deep
in the eyeslit-crypt:

Inward, upward
into the skull's inside,
where you break up heaven, again and again,
into furrow and convolution
he plants his image,
which outgrows and outgrows itself.

—CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

• Severo Sarduy, *Christ on the Rue Jacob*, Translated by Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier (San Francisco: Mercury House) 1995, 166 pp.

Employing subtleties that are multi-layered and alive with the evocative force of seemingly-superfluous detail—as well as lyrical syntactic frills which are nothing if not the teasing gestures of readerly seduction—in this miscellany of elliptical essays, incidents of travel and self-portraits with either fellow artists or with the ghosts of family and friends, the late Severo Sarduy (1937-1993) left a chillingly-accurate depiction of a body and mind whose vital appetites and blemishes are rendered with the "clear negativity" and foreknowledge of an encroaching death from AIDS.

Sarduy consistently made it his task to break down the barriers of genre. Echoing his novels which, on one level, are flamboyant stage-settings for poly-gendered cultural identities on metamorphic overdrive, these pieces, originally published in 1987, waver somewhere between intellectually-curvilinear vignettes and utterly-frank "epiphanies."

Despite his marginal association with Tel Quel—Sarduy left Cuba for Paris in the early 1960s—the general mode of the writing in *Christ on the Rue Jacob*, however, seems informed by, and far more reminiscent of, Michel Leiris' brand of auto-ethnography or self-fashioning. Indeed, these "lessons in the ephemeral" are about physical scars and the aquatint-plate of their meanings repeatedly pressed onto memory (what Sarduy calls an "Archaeology of the Skin"); about how the gaze of others—and, naturally, of the Other—can be equated, justifiably, with the sutures we bring into being, be they issued from within, or be they those we inflict onto the Outward (in Sarduy's case, onto writing); about the cycles or revolutions of alcohol as a paradigm for the rhythms inherent in our everyday breathing; about the resilient, if at times elusive nature of place ("Benares," "Wearing Space") and about death and the lavish turns of language needed to describe it—the receptacle in which there is contained an inescapable nothingness ("Dream").

With his self-effacing humor and a tremendous capacity for psychological, soulful and writerly incisiveness, the persona made to surface from the prose here emerges as someone immanently tangible, but always—as Sarduy himself seems to have engaged his own desire—at a slight remove from full disclosure:

> Nothing has crossed any exile that does not reach its best definition in that word: repetition. *Obsessions, rituals, writings*. I could include [. . .] even *la dragué*, that expectant and

> punitive cruising—in a Dantesque inferno, lovers against nature cruising through eternity, as if the punishment for that insubordination were no more than the monstrous or metaphysical multiplication of its propitious rite: running after an object perhaps more fleeting than the others, confirming, once it's reached, the border that separates it from the phantom, almost enjoying precisely that lapse, that difference, and setting off in pursuit of yet another.

[Incidentally, in addition to *Rue Jacob*, other publications last year included Dalkey Archive Press reprints of *Cobra* and *Maitreya* (translated by Suzanne Jill Levine) as well as Sun & Moon's earlier reissue of Levine's side-splitting English-language rendering of the outrageous "Curriculum Cubense" of *From Cuba with a Song* (De donde son los cantantes).]

• Kamau Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock* (Providence: Lost Roads Publishers, Number 40) 1994, 79 pp.

In a formal departure from previous extended works (*The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* and the later "Bajan" trilogy), though of a piece with his parallel *Middle Passages* and his four-hundred-page *Barbajan Poems*, in *Trench Town Rock* Kamau Brathwaite has written a documentary poem whose head-on pace and visual impact both mirror and probe the harrowing limits of the social as determined by civil and state violence.

With Kingston—"in the Kingdoom of this world"—as the specific *polis* in what is understood to be the wider common turbulence of the Caribbean, the "action" begins at a shoot-in witnessed by Brathwaite at Marley Manor in 1990. What follows is a multi-vocal montage exploring the banalization of death as rendered by the mass media, as well as the distance separating civic will from the invisibility of power. These questions are brought to a head in a radio talk-show transcription ("Straight Talk") conveying the dis/figured forms of communication between police official and caller as the former is harrowed into addressing paramilitary crime or "soldier illegality."

In an attempt to piece together personal assault into public record ("My Turn"), Brathwaite delivers language from its ab/uses, providing newer significance by means of what the poet has christened his "Sycorax video style," many of whose devices would be virtually impossible to reproduce here. They include, however, a range of fonts and point sizes—serif and sans-serif typefaces in roman, bold and italics—in an aim to confuse the hierarchy of "printed matter," as well as to allow the material nature of the

written to represent a visual matrix whereby language, however previously-bound, can now give birth to itself.

Rising from the unspeakable nature of the violence refracted in *Trench Town Rock*, it is this foregoing aspect of the poem, as well as a final call for cohesive reinstatement (via trickster-figure-cum-cultural-hero, Anansese*) which, in the end, keeps *Trench Town Rock* from falling into arrant social pessimism, no matter how relentless its critique.

• W.B. Keckler, *Ants Dissolve in Moonlight* (New York: Fugue State Press) 1995, 78 pp.

Assuming this is his first book, Keckler demonstrates an impressive capacity for emulation and tribute: a confident, myriad voice perhaps still in the process of thoroughly coming into its own. The formal range includes a reworking of surrealist idiom—announced by the title's Michauvian insects—spoken in a crusty parlance resembling that of Asa Benveniste, for example, yet also featuring inflections as disparate as those of pliant objectivist lyric ("Arles") or those in the terse expository intelligence of Laura Riding ("*What is the Word but. . .*"). There are shades pointing elsewhere, from an overt painterliness to a sort of telegraphic narrative form ("A Romance"), but in order for Keckler to overcome the limits imposed by his various modes of address, I suspect he will have to surrender a language-conscious remove—often at odds with an underlying verbal elegance ("Chant d'Amour")—and allow his more vernacular powers of composition to surface.

• John Taggart, Standing Wave (Providence: Lost Roads Publishers, Number 38) 1993, 88 pp.

Determined by a number of imposed formal constraints, the poetry of John Taggart—almost entirely based on strident lyric ellipsis and incremental repetition—is heir to the reductive estrangement achieved by Gertrude Stein, to a brand of high-objectivist distillation, and to procedures like those advanced by Jackson Mac Low and David Antin. A typical, isolated "Taggart poem" may insistently elevate to extreme foreground how (according to

* The legend has Anansese exchanging a series of goods for social song. In a 1990 interview with poet Nathaniel Mackey (published in *Hambone* 9), Brathwaite discusses his work and its vision of historical tensions wherein all "*frisson* and fusion" can be considered "creole event": wherein opposing narratives are seen as "informing each other, exchanging information."

Adorno's take on the lyric poem), "subject and object are no rigid, isolated poles, but can be identified only within a process in which they interact." In book form, however, the novelty of Taggart's art-language can be weathered to transparency. In fact, many poems decidedly beg performative interpretation to achieve what is intended to be the desired effect.

Certain poems—as in the fine couplet-woven modulations of "All the Steps"—posit a kind of intransitive lyric: the "singing about reasons for singing" which calls for collective invocation as a response to end-of-millennium discontent; others, however, belabor the limits of ambient pull ("Standing Wave") or that of actual readerly endurance. In some of the more demanding pieces, especially the six-part title poem, readers may be prone, like certain CDs, either to skip or to undergo temporary drop-out. To my mind, Taggart is at his most successful when the mode of saying seamlessly merges with the subject matter itself—like TV, for example, in the poem "Free Gifts," where the phrasing mimics the way in which we are inevitably lulled or seduced by the body of televised images and tantalizing merchandise:

> before the kiss there are gifts there are free gifts
> members of the studio audience receive free gifts
> each member receives a string of blossoms
> each member photographed with blossoms around each neck
> polaroid photograph pinned to "night with the stars" curtain.

• Alice Fulton, *Sensual Math* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company) 1995, 113 pp.

The language of advertising, TV and mass culture play a still more prominent role in the writing of Alice Fulton. In this, her poetics is visibly more advanced than generally becomes the mainstream—which may lead one to suspect that perhaps even tamer sensibilities have been hip to specific developments in the North American avant-garde over the last fifteen years—and perhaps for this reason *Sensual Math* is not entirely devoid of interest.

In "My Last TV Campaign: A Sequence"—especially the section entitled "Vanishing Cream," in which a martini buzz is equated to, and additionally blurred by, the incoherent discourse of broadcasting—Fulton splices the sexploitation underlying the promises of cocktail glamour, into a disconnectedness of tv-biz imperatives ("SWISH-PAN TO," "DOLLY IN," "ZIP-PAN") or truisms of snockered babble ("Most gin is colorless. Sloe gin isn't gin / but a liqueur").

The standard mode in Sensual Math, however, is that of brittle reverie or anecdotes describing the quirks and icons of contemporary US culture (with Elvis Presley as tutelary demi-god), meditations on such homogenizing products as "Wonder Bread," or rhapsodies on such presumably-resonant words as "quiver" (in "Echo Location"). Though audibly more fractured—and on the saucier side—Fulton's cadence relies heavily on that of Marianne Moore, namely in the angularity of its almost prose-like delivery and citation. There is an albeit baffling pretense to summon Emily Dickinson in several of the poems, but apparently more so as insinuated by Fulton's signature symbol ("=="), over which considerable fuss has been made. ["Better than a comma," claims the book's press release, "this personal punctuation mark forces us to do what we, culturally, too often forget—to pay attention"!]

The most ambitious piece in the collection is the final "Give: A Sequence Reimagining Daphne & Apollo," whose most immediate model may well be Crane's "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" in the way Fulton also seeks to shape a possible mythopoesis out of contemporary monolith and ruin. The heroes here, however, are imagined as swoon-stars:

> ...Apollo was still exulting over
>
> his recent easy
> listening hit when he happened on Cupid's opening
> at the Vegas Hilton.
> "What right hast thou to sing 'My Way,' though imbecilic Fanny
> Farmer midge larva,
> thou sewer-water-spitting gargoyle, rednecked bladderwort, dirtbag, greasdome
> and alleged immortal of a boy," Apollo fumed.

In short, Fulton's allegory retells the old story pitting nature against culture, albeit in the landscape of postmodern (read = apocalyptic) capitalism whose future horizon is envisioned as the endlessly-repeating "rhythmic scribble of stylus against label." Even at its comic best—and in keeping with the tradition of the heroi-comical poem, from Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* to Dorn's *Gunslinger*, no matter how readily-irksome the genre tends to be—Fulton's writing, both here and in much of what makes up *Sensual Math*, is often commanding, though ultimately precious.

—ROBERTO TEJADA

THE COMMON EXPERIENCE

T. M. Luhrmann. *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in a Contemporary England.* Picador 1994. ISBN 0-330-32946-4.

Yeats in his 1901 essay "Magic" said that he believed in "the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are. . ." and that ". . .many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy. . ." He thought that the practices tended to deteriorate, through the loss of a certain "quality of mind" and that his own experience of visions were "a proof of the supremacy of imagination, of the power of many minds to become one. . .all the minds gave a little, creating or revealing for a moment what I must call a supernatural artist."

It has been estimated that on Lammas (August Eve) within the confines of London in excess of 80,000 people are absorbed in using a language "to talk to their own unconscious," airing and restating "intimate feelings" "within symbolic garb," involving themselves in a deeply therapeutic enactment of myth and symbolism by means of "a phenomenological awareness of the symbols, the creation of a myth-drenched history" who are "rich with pregnant images and esoteric knowledge." What can be going on? Is this a great annual Jungfest, or the culmination of some superb art-historical Open University course, guided by radio? Or is it a political movement? It is none of these things, but all of them as well. This is the estimated number of people who are engaged in witchcraft or ritual magic to celebrate this day. The activity is immense, and dedicated to recovering religious feelings which are not prescribed but maintained by a kind of ecumenical improvisation, drawing on the symbols and emblems of all religions. "Out of body experience, mystical transcendence, meditative peace, visions, hallucinations, oneiric fantasies, imaginative intensity, spiritual unfolding, the excitement of costumes, incenses, chanting, dance, impersonation—all of these have a significant impact on the performer." It is a pursuit of what J. M. Cohen and J. F. Phipps in their book of that name called *The Common Experience* (1979). That is to say, that religious experience was not the province of a few people, but of everybody. Says Luhrmann "Experience is prior to belief. . .there are certain basic human experiences which are often associated with magical and religious practice . . .But that these experiences are vivid, and that the experiencer needs to make sense of them in order to make sense of himself—that brute reality is central to any explanation of magical practice. . ."

T. M. Luhrmann wanted to write a work of psychological anthropology "in which the subject is the mercurial complexity of belief." She arranged to meet a woman who was both a witch of importance and a member of one of the most serious of the Western Mysteries groups. This was in 1983 at a "Quest" conference. Luhrmann was told that the last person to study modern London magic had passed out questionnaires "and offended everyone." However, Luhrmann was invited to a dream-study meeting, and a workshop, and in due time became initiated into a group called the Glittering Sword, which studied Nordic magic, and attended an occult workshop, a Monday night "exercise class." "The workshop was always a warm, happy evening. . .People said they came because they liked the imaginative involvement. . .Beth took over as narrator and we would imagine that we were a tree, or sparkling water, or a tarot card, or a cat, with dreamy, soothing music. . .The highlight of the evening was a pathworking, a dream-like story read out slowly so that listeners could visualize the images it described."

Luhrmann became a member of many different groups, was initiated "at least four times" in private groups, participated in perhaps a hundred rituals and attended hundreds of meetings and magical social events. She made many friends, some beginners, some remarkable people who were adepts in "The Common Experience" and in rituals seemed to be able to communicate magical experience person to person. She seemed to find that people engaged in magic were happier than other kinds of people, less disturbed, and able to handle the modern world in a variety of occupations and professions. A very comradely feeling of "The Common Experience" comes over in the book. It was as though the ritual magician or a witch had seen or experienced something so remarkable that it gave them a happiness that was constant or at least accessible by magical methods. The witches in particular really knew how to laugh and used hilarity as part of their central invocation—"mirth and reverence": One high priestess spontaneously explained to me that "being alive is really rather funny. Wicca. . .is the only religion that captures this." Another said it was like coming home.

What is the result of being a witch, or a ritual magician? Let us compare testimonies. "Perhaps the best way to begin the power behind the simple word witch is to enter the circle. . .You don't need any of the tools you will read about in books on the Craft. . .Perhaps you might make up a chant, a string of names of gods and goddesses who were loved or familiar to you from childhood myths. . .And perhaps. . .the moon appears a bit closer, and perhaps the wind rustling the leaves suddenly seems in rhythm with your own breathing. Or perhaps the woods seem strangely noisy. Or unspeakably still. And perhaps the clear line that separates you from birds and tree and small lizards seems to melt. . ."

"What I am revealing to you now is the deepest and most essential secret of my life. . .Did I share at such times the sub-thoughts, or over-thoughts, that the old earth herself has, as she turns on her axis. . .They were at any rate what might be called sensation-thoughts. . .Even as I try to seize upon them in their vanishing they leave a lovely residue, a mysterious satisfaction, that seems to well up from the inner being of old posts, old heaps of stones, old haystacks with straw. . ."

"While on the shop and street I gazed/My body on a sudden blazed;/ And twenty minutes more or less/It seemed so great my happiness/That I was blessed and could bless."

"The hardest part of doing magical work is sometimes to actually notice that you have done it. So stop, take your time and look at your pond. Move around it, peering in and see how each part of the sky scuds across it. You have effected a great transformation. . .Be amazed. . .(For those without gardens: a saucer of water placed on a windowsill will also Draw Down the Moon."

The first of these spokespersons is indeed a Witch, M. Adler, quoted by Luhrmann; the second that great poet-magician J. C. Powys; the third that as great poet-magician W. B. Yeats, who practiced ritual magic for 40 years; and the fourth also a witch, (Wren Sidhe in "From the Flames") taking the mick out of the pomposity of some magicians.

You could imagine a martial arts exercise room, in which gestures and feelings show like electrical tracings. It is like Winnicott's notion of a "potential space" in which through a kind of play, the fantasized and the real are mingled through imagination in consoling and creative ways.

Unfortunately this hall of power has become divided, and there is a semipermeable membrane, something like a badminton net, that partially separates the room into two, the literary and the magical. The point of separation is also the place of joining, where the great poet-magicians reside, people like Yeats and Powys. This room is also called by Jungians (who are quite influential here) "active imagination." Seen from either side, one half is the mirror image of the other. Symbols and images pass fairly freely through this screen, and on the poet's side they turn into praise and wonder, while on the magician's side they are that too, but also a means of altering the world according to the conscious wishes of the magician—everybody believes that this has happened in ritual and can draw instances, but nobody is sure that it will happen again, however adroit the ritual. Both poets and magicians admit freely that there is a strong element of play, but poets expect less. On the poet's side there is a deep well, on the magician's a firm will, whatever form that may take. There is an opaque part of the membrane that certain magicians have tacked up, since they are fleeing the literary. On the corresponding side are poets, fleeing the magical. There is a very free interactive part of the membrane that is sometimes called

linguistic yoga, and there is a gathering of feminist energies that are concerned with feeling the world out by means of language-play. The last seems to meet and mingle with other more ancient energies of old rabbis learned in the streams of energy of the Kabbalah.

The screen should never have been put up. It is a recent invention, since in the Renaissance every man of learning was a poet and a magician both, and knowledge was magical knowledge. Thus Goethe's Faust in his study adjusted his famous preliminary depressions by studying magical symbols or "pathworking."

History is more popular than literature among the magicians, thus, Frances Yates is much read, while there is scarcely a whisper of the symbolist poets who, if John Senior in *The Way Down and Out* (1959) is to be believed, had a complete system with ancient roots. Likewise the poets will hardly admit to an interest in magic, and flee into disbelief and its ironic harvest; while the magicians make a practice of being in a state of the willing suspension of disbelief (or believing everything at once, as Virginia Woolf in her diary notes of Yeats)—the state of continued active imagination, or inspiration, at its various levels.

Says the great poet-priest Hopkins "The word inspiration need cause no difficulty. I mean by it a mood of great, abnormal in fact, mental acuteness, either energetic or receptive, according as the thoughts which arise in it seem generated by a stress and action of the brain, or to strike into it unasked. . ." Hopkins was professionally engaged in calling up his God, but his sermons do not seem to have been written in this mood. The ritual of his poems clearly are, they are the poetry of inspiration which "can only be written in this mood of mind, even if it last a minute, by poets themselves. Everybody of course has like moods, but not being poets what they then produce is not poetry." The Common Experience again. We do know that Hopkins would open himself to the inscapes of everything that lived, as an adept magician does, by ritual of close observation of the thisness of things, through which his god would manifest "shining like shook foil." "The ashtree. . .was lopped first: I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more." What are those "inscapes" but the magician's "spirits"?

Luhrmann discusses the likeness of the more advanced magical exercise "pathworking" to the Ignatian exercises, in which, of course, as he was a Jesuit, Hopkins was fully qualified: "St. Ignatius of Loyola certainly used the imagination in a magical fashion as preparation for personal prayer" says one of the most eminent of the contemporary adepts, and Luhrmann herself says that there are two central elements to the Exercises: "a remorseless intense examination of the conscience and a highly structured meditation which uses the visual, sensual imagination as a focus

for concentrated mental attention. The vivid mental image is always followed by a colloquy (free and unstructured converse with God). . ."

She compares the exercise with magical pathworking and finds they accord. They are still examples of the Common Experience, since pathworking at its simplest is everybody's birthright. It is "a guided fantasy, a story read slowly to allow a deeply relaxed audience to picture its images as they sit, eyes shut, in the darkness." This practice naturally develops. "Most pathworkings involve a descent, a journey, an encounter and a return. . .A pathworking is the paramount form through which power is supposedly generated, gathered and released as the story develops and climaxes." It is an intensified Common Experience. It is going for a walk, as a person, a lover, a poet, a magician, one hopes to change the mood, see what was not noticed before, and the better the walk the more the images, the inscapes will reflect each other like a net of jewels, the whole walk will become the poem you now set down to honor it; or the inspiration for the magical work using the encounters of it, a word overhead, the tapping of a branch in morse code as signs and intimations. Psychiatrists have a bad word for this: "signs of reference" and that is their reductive loss. Or you may take your walk through the paths of the visualized Tree of Life, assimilating or accepting the traditional symbols, which then may return to you as personal advice, or advice to the group of which one may be a member.

For example, one of the leading adepts cited says elsewhere: "indeed it could well be argued that for a course in practical occultism, rather than spend much intellectual effort in categorizing the various inner beings from occult textbooks, it would be far more effective to read contemplatively a few of these [Coleridge's] poems and then go into the countryside and attempt to experience a similar vision."

The rules for women are different from the men's rules, whether in magic or poetry. Indeed the thrust of much contemporary ritual magic seems to be towards possibilities for the men to become more like women.

For many women the menstrual rhythms—concealed for so long in our society—have been crucial in their magical life. It is typical of books in general, that if they mention menstruation, then it does not appear in the index. Please add pages 55, 103, 119, 270, 314 to this one. Members of a feminist coven quoted by Luhrmann call their Craft "women's spirituality . . .and the only spirituality in which women are proud to menstruate. . ." "The destructive underworlds must not be feared and shunned, but entered. . ." and in this journey the woman is not only subject but object too, and it is her personal descent and return which is part of the making-whole; "Childbirth and witchcraft each taught Mary that the pain which accompanies menstruation and childbirth is a good pain. "A woman must

face her dark side. . .this confrontation is the source of creativity." "Menstruation is the time of the greatest witchpower for any woman. . . ."

To one pre-doctoral biochemist after initiation, there were events which seemed paranormal during her period, and her dreams had become "peculiarly clairvoyant. . .most traumatically, she could no longer reproduce a published chemical reaction central to her thesis. . .in different laboratories and in different circumstances." Says Maria "Ritual sets things in motion that could not be stopped, and the ritualist must pay careful heed to the words and symbols. . ." It may be that the wheel is turning anyway, and the ritual tunes one in accordance with this. In any case, once one begins to explore magic, matters are brought into focus that otherwise would be neglected. Most particularly, if the dreams are recorded and related to the menstrual cycle, the unconscious stirs, and great symbolic riches are revealed. Is the woman's pattern central to contemporary ritual? It sometimes seems so. But men dream too. It is possible that a woman conjures his magical self into a man.

It scarcely matters, argues Luhrmann, whether the rituals as petitions actually deliver the things asked for. When a person approaches any region where the archetypes are energized or in play, there will be meaningful coincidences, whether in love, or in psychoanalysis, or in intense artistic activities, there will be these "synchronicities." Our society has learned so little about the unconscious mind that it cannot provide any rational explanation for such occurrences, so a magical explanation is perhaps the best one, though it will not be an explanation in the ordinary sense, but rather something worked through. Synchronicities can be sought and they can be frightening, as for our author when "events arrange themselves in interpretable patterns." If you "raise power," there are likely to be synchronicities. Moreover there is "tingling in the fingers" "the air is electric, tingling with energy." Magical power is "like being absorbed in a good novel, or like being sexually turned on." "It's like being in love. The colors are richer, the air is fresher, the world is electric and alive."

Says J.H. Brenan elsewhere "The effect of that room was staggering . . .its essence was not heat but something else, something that could be sensed perfectly. . .by the nerve endings beneath this skin of the face." Everybody knows these atmospheres that manifest in a human gathering everywhere from theater to football-match but society prefers to look the other way when it comes to a rational explanation. But the magicians and witches have a way of talking about such events that does not cancel them but which keeps them in creative play. As Margaret, a witch, reports "Medieval modal logic. Not what's true or false, the way we think of it in our century. . .but the way things are true and false." She found this "mind-blowing." "There was far more depth here than I could actually handle . . .For me it was a bridge between the rational and the rational mind. . .I

came back to England to explore the ancient mysteries, the female mysteries. . .witch craft. . .it grounds you. . . I don't know many people in magic who are disturbed and obviously unhappy."

Are there not dangers, though? There is little discussion of this, except to minimize them. We hope it may be as Luhrmann reports. Does the ritual practice handle all problems of the transference? Does it lead painlessly to the uniting of the opposites and ebullient mental health, as in the hilarity of the witches? What if one meets, as Meyrink did, a Doctor Schrepfer? Everything he says is two-edged—"he lies and his speech contains the highest truth: he speaks the truth and lies smirk out of it." In Meyrink's tale (Master Leonard) Schrepfer is a quack doctor—but this is or can be a valid initiatory procedure if entered upon willingly—"the master must harass the student until he is clear" says Lemuel Johnstone. The dangers in this with predatory people who want power of a personal kind over others, psychic bullying, are obvious. The book is enthusiastic, exciting, thought-provoking. Alas, sexual magic is played down. Aleister Crowley is in our opinion condescended to: ". . .a brilliant man with a peculiar spiritual bent and a certain literary talent. . . ." Sexuality is arguably the greatest and most easily-accessible of magics, and Crowley, once one has got past the tabloidizing knee-jerk reflex is arguably a major pioneer of the new magic. Lodges stemming from his O.T.O. and working in London are not given fair mention here, nor is the name of his distinguished successor Kenneth Grant mentioned, or his magically-important books listed.

—PENELOPE SHUTTLE and PETER REDGROVE

Commentary

Once this was all Black Plasma and Imagination reads the inscription at the beginning of Michael McClure's *3 Poems* (Penguin Books, 1995), reiterating what for McClure has been a primal source of all his work, an abiding interest in the life sciences & a passionate commitment to the preservation of the natural world. "Dolphin Skull," (1995) is the first of the 3 long poems, followed by "Rare Angel" (1975) and "Dark Brown" (1961).

Reading from the most recent to McClure's embryonic past is like digging down through geological layers, Quaternary turtles to Mesozoic metaphors to early Silurian metonyms. "Dark Brown" is a seminal, liberating work, a brash debouch of McClure's projectivist impulse. The goal, McClure remarked at a recent reading, "was to create art, not socially enforcing literature." To liberate the image within a deep area of consciousness & body; realize the creative act as a physical event. The tone of "Dark Brown" is truculent & purgative, a rebellion against the fifties' cold war as well as McClure's own customs & habits. "It was a dark night of the soul," McClure says in the preface, "and I wanted to use liberational methods to discover the substance of spirit." Not all of "Dark Brown" is dark brown. I would call "Fuck Ode," the second section of "Dark Brown," a warm, sanguinary rose. The energy charge of this poem is astonishing. "Dolphin Skull" & "Rare Angel" are more complexly evolved organisms, manifesting McClure's characteristic morphology, lines of manifold length symmetrically radiating from a central spine. The effect overall is a sensation of heartbeat, systole & diastole, or contraction & expansion of the lungs in respiration. Many of the images are often charmingly simple, "Flat as stars cut out of tinfoil," "Raindrops on the brim/ of a hat," sometimes intricate & weirdly affecting, "enzymatic structures of subtle happiness/ in an/ old woman's words," & sometimes unexpectedly blunt: "Gun the size of a toilet." Like "gases and stars in a plasma," or a "Big cloud" "made out of meat," the poems get under your skin. Reading "Dolphin Skull" on a hot bus one day at 3rd and Virginia in downtown Seattle, a fat woman smacking the legs of her 3-year-old daughter, the little girl screeching, gasping for breath, a man with a motor neuron disease rolling by *Swifty Printing,* steam rising through a manhole cover, a small thin man in brown slacks & plaid hat with a little red feather, missing all his teeth, his mouth caved in, his gaze alert & searching I felt a glad compassion for the cells & organelles of this life, the adventure of being alive, however calamitous it can sometimes be, & happy to get a taste of McClure's chromosomal sugar.

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Ron Silliman's long alphabet poem is an ambitious project, somewhat like the accretion of the Great Barrier Reef, or building of the Great Wall of China. *N/O* (Roof Books, 1994), "being two parts of *The Alphabet,* "Non" & "Oz," is the latest installment. The titles are as stark as they are enigmatic. Is *N/O* intended to be read as a title? The cover presents two solid black letters on a white background with a diagonal running between them, as if the word—if it is a word—were simultaneously affirming and denying itself. Or is it simply 'N' & 'O'? To what does "Non" refer? Nonprojectivist? Nonreferential? Nonprohibitive? Nonporous? Nonlinear? Who is the wizard

of "Oz"? Is it Charles Olson pulling the tropes & levers of language, or is it the inherent illusions of language itself? "One is to words/ always an outsider," Silliman writes in "Non," "tho they invade your head,/ colonize dreams." (Curiously, these lines appear in a column structured similarly to McClure's symmetrical wings, though the arbitrariness of Silliman's discreteness contrasts tellingly with McClure's more intuitive, spontaneously achieved disjunctions). I enjoy reading Silliman, though it's hard to say why. There's no narrative, no hint of closure, denouement, or swelling diapason to sweep you along. Reading Silliman is like being in a houseboat; you're floating, but there's no destination. "Meaning is forever homeless," he writes in "Non," which is followed, a few lines later, by *"Mais langue n'est pas langage."* Silliman's project throughout the alphabet series has been to systematically block the integration of sentences to a "higher level" of exterior reference, to sustain focus on the signifier as the locus of literary meaning. What is unique about *N/O* in this series are the "small surprises, conducting wires thrown between words, references, contexts, ideas, which I did not expect," to quote Rosmarie Waldrop. In previous works such as *Ketjak & Tjanting,* Silliman's prosodic devices—punning, assonance, polysemy—were employed internally within the sentence, the text being wholly prose. In "Non" & "Oz" he makes use of the linebreak in a way that seems more of a sublation, a quizzical flirtation, than a pert debunking of the projectivist tenet of form as an extension of content. There is no intent to finesse composition by field, give the kinetics of writing the same kind of acrobatic energy evidenced in Olson, or turn it into slapstick. The intent seems more to uncover the spatial scoring of the thinking process as a trick, an illusion, a rumbled sheet of aluminum. Silliman is not a cynical artist. His politically engaged stance is firm & sincere if not quixotic. What is most enjoyable about *N/O* is not the way it limes projectivist birds, but the way it slips its knots.

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Poetry and politics make peculiar bedfellows. One is private experience made public, the other public experience made private. In Will Alexander's *Asia & Haiti* (Sun & Moon, 1995), poetry writhes like a wounded snake in a miasma of brutality & oppression. "Asia" is a tung oil turned flame, the ore of words compressed into a blade. It is filled with arcanum & fervor, "With structures/ kaleidoscopic with vermin." "With spells/ with fabulous eradications & wildness." A "rudimentary balance" in a "floating Boschian domain." "Haiti" is populated by Duvalier's Tontons, Papa Doc's "rotted & greenish blood." A "volatile anguish" "rising to a pitch of unspared power." Political oppression is global; that Alexander has chosen these two geographic locations is significant. Both have strong associations with

religion & the supernatural. Shelley called poets legislators & prophets, visionaries who drew their authority from "that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion." This is what gives "Asia" such tremendous pathos, taking China's invasion of Tibet as point of departure. It is a poem with a surrealistic aperture, oracular lens & Delphic tripod. "Haiti" is "savage with usurption," convulsing in "nux vomica & braille," conversing in "spittle & voltage." "Shrieking/ mocking the Tontons with their terror." At times it is like watching a boil get lanced. But the propulsive force of the language keeps the eyes rolling across its metempiric topography, magnetized by its "runic auroras" & the collective force "of burning ink & kings."

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In Pam Rehm's *To Give It Up* (Sun & Moon, 1995) the subjective disposition of the lyric mood is refined by subtleties of language & "the breath of which the thing consists." There is a courtly delicacy about these poems, passionate declarations tempered by a seemly wit. "The consequences of Love are a/ domination of names;" she writes in "Straightway A Valentine," "of those we seek to follow, serve, or be guided by." Words are so charged with illuminative energy as to shadow the lineaments of mortal finitude, limitation, vulnerability. There is much subtlety of word play, "abiding/ bending," "source/ force," & the seductive pull of riddles: "There is a star which before/ it can come we must embrace it/ to the center of ourselves." Antique words like 'thou' do not seem entirely out of place in these poems; their anachronistic gauze is shaded by penetrating, nihilistic dye. It's a bit like seeing Patti Smith in an evening gown. "One darkens oneself," she writes, "To see and not be seen." "Things only appear/ when a person feels/ lighter than water." The poems in *To Give It Up* (a woman in a black dress & high heeled shoes lies unconscious on the cover) reflect a lambent ardor, puddles subtle as sleeves, the sheen of words refracting chimerical referents, "a hint to something much more qualified than real." Nietzsche, in elaborating Schiller's theory of *musical mood*, specifies the most important phenomenon of all ancient lyric poetry is "the *union*, indeed, the *identity*, of the *lyrist with the musician*." It is this musical enchantment that emits "picture sparks, lyrical poems." "The fulguration of music in images and concepts." "The things," Pam Rehm writes, "which remain in the breath." Agitations, allures, necessities. The necessity to "approach the beloved," the necessity "to express ourselves," "to tell of a fever which remains within."

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how now, poems by Cid Corman (Cityful Press, 1995) is a small brown book with a Chinese character on the cover. Not knowing what the character meant, I took *how now* to a Chinese restaurant on Queen Anne hill here in Seattle to ask if someone could inform me. I didn't have to ask. The young man who brought our tea saw it & got very excited. He thought the character quite lovely. And it is. But what does it mean, I asked. The road, he replied. But it also implies a path, a trail, a way of life. How do you pronounce it? In Mandarin the word is *tao*.

The poems in this volume are droll, unadorned, & gnomic. According to Andrew Schelling's afterword they are inspired by China's *Tao te Ching*. The vocabulary is simple, but "Every word/ conceals/ a meaning// You or/ your shadow/ understand." Corman uses but a few words to create these gnomic knots. I wish this were the sort of thing they put in fortune cookies. "The simplest word finds renewal in the breath's devotion," Corman writes in an essay titled "The Feeling in the Make of Poetry," first published in an issue of *Origin*, October, 1978. The core of the word is breath. "Only the breath/ leads us on." "A shadow trudging/ after a shadow." Elementary as counters on a Go board, *how now*'s words are grouped to intimate intimacies of death & life, body & shadow, nothingness & existence. Nothingness fills these poems like warm breath in a cool cave. "Every syllable rings and trues," Corman writes in an essay picked up from *Wen Fu* of Lu Ki, "word shapes word—phrase phrase. Here implies there—everywhere elicits core." There is a constant care at the core of this book, & Corman is a caring man.

—JOHN OLSON

Various Libidos

Beyond the theater of cruelty, Valère Novarina stands convincingly in the tradition of Artaud (see *Sulfur* 27). His most recent work, *La chair de l'homme* (Paris, P.O.L., 1995)—adapted for the theater and performed last summer at the *Festival d'Avignon*—is a continuation of his lifelong mutation of the French language. Here, we find 3171 different personages

(most manifested as total linguistic phantoms, existing only in name, without any voice whatsoever), 429 definitions of God (a vast juxtaposition which is, perhaps unwittingly though witfully, the most convincing deconstruction of theology I have yet encountered), as well as the use of 2587 of the 6912 verbs in the French language (tellingly, Novarina's own calculations). Novarina's onomastic fantasies equal those of his numerical obsessions: both constitute an apparent totalization of the real which, in fact, effect a fragmentation of the perceived and conceived world. With constant wit and invention, we are given the most intimate lessons in the marginalia of the French language. For example, one section (previously published as an accompaniment to the annual catalogue of the Savoyard *Foire des Crêtes),* consists of hundreds of simple declarative sentences each consisting of an action (in each case effected by a different verb) performed by one of the local townsfolk, each referred to by their nickname. We find, through the complexities and contradictions of Novarina's writing, the depths of the French language represented by the breadth of its local inflections—another case in point of the postmodern conflict between universal cognition and regional expression.

Michel Nedjar's retrospective exhibition, now travelling through Germany and Holland, is represented by an excellent catalogue published by the show's organizer, the Galerie Susanne Zander (Cologne). It is entitled *Les ongles en deuil,* a French expression translatable as "mourning nails," figuratively expressing that precondition for so much art (dirty finger nails), but whose literal meaning is equally to the point of Nedjar's recent work, imbued with death and mourning, yet celebrating creativity and regeneration (see *Sulfur* 26).

In the Preface to *Under World Arrest,* Clayton Eshleman explains a major source of his personal iconography: "The earliest underworlds and the origin of image have been re-visioned in my poetry for years. However, having pushed back to the primal places of ensouling, as underworlds they appear to be in arrest. This does not mean that they are dead—it means that when I crouch in Combarelles, decorated at 13,000 BCE, and attempt to read the walls, there is most definitely an abyss between subject and object that, to my knowledge, may only be crossed in poetry." This might, therefore, be the occasion to note the publication of three spectacularly illustrated books in a new series from Les Éditions du Seuil dedicated to paleolithic art: Jean Clottes and Jean Courtin, *La grotte Cosquer : Peintures et gravures de la caverne engloutie* (1994; an American edition is forthcoming from Abrams); Jean Clottes, *Les cavernes de Niaux : Art Préhistorique en Ariège* (1995); Jean-Marie Chauvet, Eliette Brunel Deschamps and Christian Hillaire, *La grotte Chauvet : A Vallon Pont-d'Arc* (1995). The book on Cosquer is of particular interest. Discovered in 1991 near Marseilles, Cosquer consists of underwater caves containing a wide variety of images,

believed to be the earliest known paleolithic wall paintings: classic animals such as bison, horses and ibexes and much rarer sea creatures such as seals and penguins, as well as dozens of geometric patterns and impressions of hands. As an unfortunate aside, it should be stated that the fate of these caves is disconcerting: we should realize that there are also insidious reactions to the abyss, namely ego-defense through obliteration. It was found that some of the images were already disfigured by graffiti, quite a feat given the relative inaccessibility of the caves; they have since been closed under lock and key. Do the bars to the cave, or rather the graffiti itself, constitute what Artaud, in another context, wrote of as a necrophagia that is the ultimate bar raised against the unworldly chaos of the libido?

Two recent books of literary theory dealing specifically with French libido are worthy of note. Lawrence R. Schehr's, *The Shock of Men: Homosexual Hermeneutics in French Writing* (Stanford University Press, 1995), is a profound work on the relations between homosexual erotics and hermeneutics in Proust, Barthes, Tournier and Renaud Camus. This book is one of several recent efforts to reinvigorate considerations of corporeal passion as a corrective to an academic postmodernism all too often moralizing and demoralizing. One of the seminal studies on the topic, it offers the added benefit of introducing to the American public the work of Renaud Camus—one of France's leading gay writers, certainly worthy of translation. This work is a lesson in reading and a celebration of the individual, at a historical moment when literacy, individuality and marginality are threatened in a political climate that, on both right and left, aims at narrowing the range of aesthetic and erotic endeavor.

Pierre Saint-Amand's, *The Libertine's Progress: Seduction in the Eighteenth-Century French Novel* (Brown University Press, 1994), is a study of what may be considered the culminating epoch of worldly seduction, the 18th century. Informed by the contemporary theory and criticism of Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, René Girard and Chantal Thomas, this work spans the scope of the libertine novel from Marivaux and Diderot through Laclos and Sade, revealing the dark and sensual side of the century of Enlightenment. The rhetorical and historic forces that govern the passions are disclosed in a book that constantly provides the means to reconsider, in the light of desire, those details (both overtly grand and seemingly insignificant) of which are composed art, literature and history.

In the context of the two aforementioned works, of great importance is the publication by Le Seuil of the *Oeuvres complètes* of Roland Barthes in three volumes—a monumental event that needs no further comment.

In *Sulfur* 35 I announced the landmark republication of Louis Sébastien Mercier's *Le tableau de Paris;* the sequel has now appeared, *Le nouveau Paris,* followed by *Les derniers tableaux de Paris* (Mercure de France, 1994; 1890 pages), also edited by Jean-Claude Bonnet. Originally published in

1799, this journalistic work is invaluable in fleshing out our sense of a post-revolutionary Paris on the verge of the modern epoch. It is accompanied by a second slim volume which is an invaluable visual aid, *Le Paris de Louis Sébastien Mercier,* consisting of a district by district comparison of contemporary Paris (using Michelin maps) and the Paris of Mercier, represented by the 1799 edition of Edme Verniquet's atlas of Paris, followed by a complete toponymic index. As the Verniquet guide widely was used in the 19th century (though finally made obsolete by Haussmannization), it will also serve as a guide to the Paris of Baudelaire & Co.

Libido of a very different sort is evident in the first fictional work of Chantal Thomas, *La vie réelle des petites filles* (Gallimard / Hautes Enfances, 1995). This volume consists of several dozen short tales centered on numerous very bizarre, very perverse, very creative little girls (see *Sulfur* 28). For those who know Chantal Thomas' critical writings, it is difficult not to begin reading the tales of these little minxes in the light of the seditions and seductions of a Sade, a Casanova or a Marie-Antoinette. This is a work in which the narrative structure hovers ambiguously between realism and phantasm, such that our sense of orientation and continuity perpetually fluctuates, in a sort of epistemological oxymoron. After the frissons evoked by a few of these encounters, not only might we begin to reinterpret such libertines according to the adventures of *les petites filles,* but we must also begin to enter and rediscover certain forbidding regions of our own past. A troubling and joyful book.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

"in some ways"

". . .in some ways the most important book of fiction published here in the last twenty years." William Carlos Williams upon the publication of John Sanford's *The People From Heaven,* 1943. Few others shared Williams' enthusiasm for Sanford's fiction; few knew how to read fiction. Perhaps it was the political blacklisting. Perhaps it just takes time, like the time it has taken for Meridel Le Sueur (born in 1900 but still alive and five years older

than Sanford) to be re-discovered, and like her to be seen as an innovator and a formalist rather than a realist or a political writer, political—the worst label that can be attached to a writer in this country.

> For A Man Without Shoes, the sixteen seasons of the next four years were all of them winter. During that period, the book was submitted to some thirty publishers, and thirty times it was declined. No rejection, however, was predicated on the political cast of the book: the grounds given, though they varied in detail, were always literary, always they smelled of the lamp. (1982 introduction, Black Sparrow edition)

I know little about American fiction, but I know enough to realize that Sanford is a better writer than most who were praised when he was still being reviewed in major literary magazines, better than those praised now in the magazines major or minor. He is such a good writer, that to me the degree to which he is unrecognized is the measure by which we judge not only commercial publishing (the purveyors of obscenities like the writings of Newt Gingrich and Colin Powell) but the small presses scene as well.

I got re-married last month, October. Several of my writer friends sent books as presents. The one I've enjoyed most is the one Sanford sent, a copy of his *A Man Without Shoes* published in 1951. Sanford published the book himself after it was rejected too many times, this after he had had a successful publishing history. (Those who believe in progress, the small presses as but step-stones to the big, take note.) It was this book by Black Sparrow Press, in a different version, re-released with a short introduction by Sanford tipped in, that was my first introduction to the work of the man who has become my favorite writer of American fiction. Sanford may never be recognized as the master stylist of American fiction: established critics hate to admit they were once stupid; young ones don't know who he is let alone have an opinion about him. But he is my master of American fiction. And here is one illustration why.

Reading *A Man Without Shoes* now is to witness the birth of Sanford's later style, a style that needs be seen as a radical departure in how fiction treats history. It can be argued that all fiction is history: even meta-fiction from Laurence Sterne to Kathy Acker is a variant of "Once upon a time." But the beginning of non-fiction fiction or fact-as-fiction, the novels of Paul Metcalf, Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl*, Eduardo Galeno's *Masks of Fire*, Michelle Butor's later works, William Vollman's *The Ice Shirt*, even the novelistic histories of Capote and Mailer, can be traced to this twice-neglected masterpiece. (In '51 the boxes of un-sold books accumulated in Sanford's basement; in '82 Black Sparrow sold what they did on their reputation not Sanford's.) Sanford's later works, *A More Goodly Country*,

subtitled "A Personal History of America" [1975], *View From This Wilderness*, subtitled "American Literature as History" [1977], *To Feed Their Hopes* [1980], *The Winters of That Country* [1984]) are masterful weavings of the materials of history into poetry. No one but Sanford has redeemed our history with such love of these materials, with such a sure sense of what exactly does matter, and with such sure command of the language to ensure that the form in-forms our present time by re-forming the past. And it begins in 1943:

> By then, you'd begun your fifth novel, A Man Without Shoes, and when a death in the family drew you East again at the close of the War, you took the manuscript with you for submission. (*Maggie, A Love Story*, NY: Barricade, 1993)

Fathers and sons. And heroes. This (for they are one thing) is at the core of Sanford's work. A young boy, Dan, the hero of this novel.

> The main spread of his development was political, and while he never did a signal deed or spoke in smoking words, what force he possessed was outward, and in his efforts to transcend himself, to the extent that he succeeded, he no longer struck me as ordinary. (His introduction to the Black Sparrow edition).

His father has returned home to his wife and son: ". . .the boy saw the hack-driver, his shirt sown with blood and his nose hidden under a blood-logged bandage." He had encountered a union organizer, and it was with words ("I'm not against the rich. I'm in favor of the poor.") that the driver was won over. The fight came later, the two men having something to prove to themselves and each other, not to battle for an ideology. And the boy? The boy sees his dad and more, as more: "[Like a soldier, you thought, like a soldier in the stories Mom read you out of A Boy's History of America.]"

The story of Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne, the British General undone by Form, undone by the un-orthodox, unique style that was America, is woven through the account of the man's telling of his own battle. And the woman: "The woman smiled. 'All right,' she said, 'who won?'" And this section of the novel, "HEROES," it ends:

> [When the soldiers get bloody, they put on bandages, so if a man has a bandage, he's a soldier even if he's your father, and if he's your own father, then he's the best soldier in the whole world: he wins all the fights.]

And the next section of the novel is HEARING AND VISION. As it must be. For the heroics, rather the establishment of the hero, the way heroics is established in our lives, when it is, is through the voice, when vision is made possible through the sound of words. The heroics of Sanford's writing is the word made flesh. And that way is only through the voice. To hear is to see clearly. To see clearly is to read with an appreciation of what it means to be a writer. And the writer who can do that, and here is the place where it begins for him, to transform history into the present lives of his characters (and into ours), that writer has announced the way out of the dilemma each writer works within. And to our sad luck it was an annunciation within a room, a room with a view to be sure, but the windows were sealed against the sound.

At the same time, a year before the publication of the novel a poet as alive to the sound of words as Sanford and as impressed with the need for heroics, convinced that the dead words on the page needed to be liberated if we were to be, was disclaiming on "that verse which print bred":

> What we have suffered from, is manuscript, press, the removal of verse from its producer and its reproducer, the voice, a removal by one, by two removes from its place of origin *and* its destination. For the breath has a double meaning which latin had not yet lost. (Charles Olson, "Projective Verse")

The projective novel? Not absolutely so, but the seeds. They are here. It begins here. Once upon this time "in some ways."

—JOE NAPORA

Disembodied Poetics: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School. Edited by Anne Waldman and Andrew Schelling, University of New Mexico Press, 1994, 501 pp.

What are the politics of American literature? Such a question is raised at the outset of *Disembodied Poetics*, the new anthology from the Kérouac School at Naropa, casting a long shadow over the book's contents—a perpetual dawn or dusk, depending upon how you want to look at it—in the form of more questions, endless questions. It's first paper, Amiri Baraka's "Cultural Revolution and the Literary Canon" calls for a need to desegregate the study of American literature and "connect Euro-American Modernism with the Harlem Renaissance, or the Beat Generation with the Black Arts Movement." There's also a Q&A section where Baraka's remarks are so sweeping and ideological at times, you may find yourself wanting to know what he has to say about *everything*: "When they say 'democracy' they actually mean the old Greek model in the first place, they mean two hundred guys living off the backs of a hundred slaves, is what they mean." But then, he spins: "You see, if you go back through the constitution , you'll find out that there's more democracy in it than we know." In his ability to make you be the judge and act upon your judgment, Baraka's placement at the outset of *Disembodied Poetics* is an accurate augury of both its wisdom and its politics.

The theme of race is touched upon again, near the end, by Lorenzo Thomas in "The Blues and The King's English" where for the purpose of dispelling someone's complaint that "no one seems to read poetry anymore," he sets up a duel between the "courtly," "private" traditions of lyric poetry in the English language, written for the "amusement" of "the owner class," and "the African-American oral tradition," a poetry that serves a public purpose. He uses the example of how the lines, "If we must die, let it not be like hogs / Hunted and penned and in an inglorious spot" found scrawled on a scrap of paper in the debris after the Attica prison uprising, were in turn characterized by *Time* magazine, shortly after the event, as "a bit of found doggerel [...] written by one of the desperate prisoners in his cell." It turns out the lines are from a rather courtly-styled 1919 work by the poet Claude McKay, written to protest the lynching of African Americans during that period. Though he recalls traditional black folklore, like the Brer Rabbit stories to exemplify a truly public poetics—one of clear morals where "the message is always 'do the right thing,'" for Thomas, it's not so much the style of poetry as its content that determines its validity and, in turn, its content that dictates the style, which must, by necessity, be free of

the rhetorical strategies and self-consciousness that tend to accompany the "private" tradition. But this dualism is easily defied, raising immediate speculation. Take, for example, the recently executed man, Thomas J. Grasso, who handed a note to prison officials, characterized by the New York Times as essentially, *a bit of found doggerel*, which read: "What we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from." *This* piece of doggerel happens to be a direct quote from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. I even heard some Washington pundit use this very line the other day, which is certainly no defense against Eliot's inevitable courtly function. Though he wrote it with intense privacy and personal consternation, Eliot's later verse still serves a very moral and public function, (whether it amuses you or not, whether it be to protest Capital Punishment or bolster a political agenda) though not always as he intended it to as a propagandist for the Church of England.

Susan Howe's, "The Captivity of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," the most poetic, feminist and historical of *Disembodied*'s essays, begins with an oppression derby between a Puritan Colonist and the Native Americans who capture her, recalling Ashbery's *Lacustrine Cities*, that are "angry with history," "the product of an idea: that man is horrible, / for instance, / Though this is only one example."—that man *is horrible* can be but only one example (and a perhaps too oft-sited one at that), for those who are angry with history. But Howe sites this example once again, and takes it up a very interesting notch by practicing Thoreau's idea that "exaggerated history is poetry," and continuing her own brand of Foucault's *archeology* of knowledge and discourse, which she practiced so well in her book on Emily Dickinson. The result is one of *Disembodied*'s most pragmatic essays, affecting discourse with a sort of captivity of its own—Howe often breaks into verse, mirroring the very text she is reading: "A Sovereign thinks the sun. Form and Force begin with Him. If there is evil in the Universe, it is good and therefore marvelous. Law scans the grammar of liberty and surrender. Catastrophe is a matter of fact. Who can open the door of God's face?" It is also her style to *use* text as a method of reading—not merely as a source, but as *material* so that one is made to see, and not merely read for signs or get angry. Accordingly, her quotations are generous and astonishing, such as the autopsy of a still-born child in John Winthrop's *Journal-History*: "The small globes I likewise opened and perceived the matter of them. . .to be partly wind and partly water. . . .[. . .] six of them were as great as his fist, and one as great as two fists; the rest each less than another, the smallest about the biggness of a small Indian bean, and like the pearl in a man's eye."

There's an underlying, very much *embodied*, call in *Disembodied Poetics*, (since you probably have a job, and write in your spare time, you might be able to afford a $30 copy of it), *not* to steal books, go on romantic

road trips, loaf around or do drugs, but to *work* (through all 501 pages), to educate yourself, which is also the work of consciousness, which has always been the essence of *beat*. *That other* beatnik-type stuff worked well then the ruling class was clearer, more generic, and there was no inflation. Now, with power's heterogeneity and capital's increasingly virtual state, there's no time to mess around. The poet who wrote *Howl* is now a daddy-o often introduced as *Professor* Ginsberg, while his contemporary, Philip Whalen, also represented here, has taken a road less-traveled as a Buddhist abbot. But make no mistake, Professor Ginsberg clearly outlines the contemporary advantages of studying Buddhism, and devotes crystalline paragraphs to explicating the essence of Kerouac's own version of it: "Gates of dharma are endless, I vow not to boycott anyone." Thus renewing the relevance of Kerouac beyond commodity fetishism and banalization, and to teachers who have neglected the Buddhist core of his work in favor of Kerouac as antihero of "the culture of affluence," and other easy-listening, didactic takes.

Where Ginsberg is often hung up on Kerouac's Catholicism as an anti-Buddhist, "cross of suffering," Clarke Coolidge, in his paper on Kerouac, sees it as another manifestation, along with Be Bop, of his phenomenal range as a writer. Often siting non-canonical texts such as *Visions of Cody*, where, says Coolidge, in exploring the origins of Jack's "Bop Prosody," "Kerouac is talking about Lee Konitz, who said he 'inspired me in 1951 to write the way he plays.' 'He can take care of himself even though he goofs and does 'April in Paris' from inside out as if the tune were a room he lived in and was going out at midnight with his coat on.'" Coolidge's "Kerouac" revels in a fascination with language that is rare in this anthology and has more to do with an earlier Naropa collection, *Talking Poetics*, which featured such luminaries as Ted Berrigan and John Cage (both notably absent here; especially the former, who once gave a brilliant talk on Kerouac at Naropa). But any language or materially-oriented approach to writing is formidably challenged in Alice Notley's, "Epic & Women Poets"—one of this anthology's riskier essays in its assertion that "to break and recombine language is nothing" and that "dreams are not language; they are fleshy and vivid, they are 'real.' And they are 'about' us & everything; both the source and paradigm of art. They are the bed of new beginnings, the place to turn." Proceeding against the margins of what the Twentieth Century discourse of language and literature, from Naropa to France, has been about—(1) the elimination of the subject from language; the deconstruction of language as mimesis of human nature, presence, vision and voice; (2) the critique of the unconscious as the production of desire via the interpretation and use of dreams to cure neuroses or create illusions of self-realization—Notley discards "language" as a male-dominated, over-determined, dead system. Accordingly, the writing (and reading) of poetry

is no longer an exploration of systems of language—a new way of writing, traceable to Stein through the Objectivists, and to today, via the Language School, that was (and still is) tired of the over-explanation and hegemony of the subject (regardless of its gender), that sought (and still seeks) to make of writing *an action*, conscious of the fact that what is internal to what is called action is that it does not know itself (which suggests the heart of Buddhism or *Suññatā*—voidness: all things, without any exception, especially, the self). For Notley, whatever "language" was is back to being about the author and the author's dreams, which as Notley asserts, are "more real" than language.

Bravely striving for the institutional equivalent of Kerouac's *dharma* in a culture that is ever-narrowing as it appears to expand, Ann Waldman and Andrew Shelling, *Disembodied*'s editors, round-out a Buddhist notion of American literature as an all-encompassing philosophy of life and art that is the Kerouac School's continuing purpose. Waldman's lively interview on poetry and life entitled "Vow to Poetry" and Schelling's eloquent essay on Buddhism and American Poetry, "Mounting the Poetry Vehicle," evoke a generosity of spirit and voice that is refreshingly consistent with their philosophy, and extremely rare in contemporary American poetry. However, Waldman's enchanting life/art mantra of "no self," "no goal," "discovering life at the edge of death, all the time" and Shelling's intoxicating idea that one need not buy a ticket to mount the poetry vehicle, but "just get on board," threaten to ring hollow (along with other notes in this anthology) as what Hegel called, "a type of freedom [. . .] a piece of cleverness that has mastery within a certain range" as is often the case with American versions of Mahayana Buddhism that over-emphasize the "great way or vehicle" into a relativistic (very American) frenzy that is merely a *literalization* of Kerouac and *Suññatā*,—the gap between saying it ("I'm a Buddhist," or "I'm a poet," even) and *really* doing it, so wide it is easily disguised, seriously misunderstood and rarely bridged. All this in a context such as *Disembodied Poetics* that is saying many things *disembodied* and doing others very much *embodied*, historically and politically. And as a body politic, some of its authors or those who signed the "Declaration of Interdependence" near the end of the book, take up space, assert "truth," territories, and the kind of power (political) that knows it's not good to see two sides of certain questions when you have to officially follow one (no "I contradict myself. I contain multitudes" speeches, especially when adressing "the Congresses of all nations" regarding issues such as "ending the arms race"). In other words, this anthology, unlike certain others as of late, actually takes up unequivocal positions on certain issues such as the environment and education. However, the main essays and interviews speak clearly and actively for themselves, to the politics of our times, with a basic strategy of always heightening awareness, as dharma should.

The revolutionary aspects of *Disembodied Poetics* somewhat fulfill Baraka's credo *that you be judge,* but the old tendency of revolutionaries *to long for a master, despite themselves,* is still there. Helping or hurting in this process are a number of other Naropa apostles, American outriders and geniuses, including, William Burroughs, Anselm Hollo, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Lyn Hejinian, Robin Blaser, Ed Sanders, Nathaniel Tarn, Nathaniel Mackey, Leslie Scalapino, Jack Collom, Bernadette Mayer and Rikki Ducornet. Peter Lamborn Wilson gives a dizzying reading of Fourier, while David Levi Strauss concludes with a fitting homage to Robert Duncan's legendary, New College poetics lectures, and Duncan himself, in Duncan's words:

> In the old stories, the protagonist learns
> what Time has to do with him. And in his true
> indentity burns within the learning.
> He serves the years.

—ROBERT V. HALE

Henri Michaux, *Meidosems: Poems and Lithographs*, Tr. Elizabeth Jackson, Moving Parts Press, Santa Cruz, CA, 1992.
An Henri Michaux Anthology: 1927-1984, Ed. and Tr. David Ball, UCal Press, 1994.

Working from a tip I'd gotten from another dissatisfied, literate graduate student, I picked up the New Directions *Selected Writings of Henri Michaux,* translated by Richard Ellmann, to amuse myself between reading and writing assignments on Melville, Emerson, Dreiser, et al. We were in the English Department (c. 1970), aimed waveringly at Ph.D.'s in British and American Lit, so we spent a lot of time hunting up, and reading, books outside our ever-narrowing curriculum requirements—Raymond Chandler, Karl Jung, Rimbaud, Wittgenstein, anything that could further us in our "careers," anything that distracted us.

For me, Michaux served very, very well. Though I doubt I could have put a name to it then, looking back through those 1927-43 texts that Ellmann did, I'd say now that they revealed to the increasingly constrained aging student a man of independent spirit, a writer of shocking integrity—issues I was worried about. The narrator—for these early texts are more like stories, or travelogues, than are later Michaux prose works—seemed a curious, quirky, enigmatic, outrageous sort, a "character," akin to many in Kafka and Dostoevski, or Charlus and Bloch in Proust. And I loved the style, an odd mix—rough-hewn, preoccupied, blunt, wry, self-deprecating, anxious, hurried. Never long-winded, academic verbose, or aloof. The dramatic situations were great, too, especially in *A Certain Plume* (1931), where the figure is thrown around in a hilarious and harrowing fashion threatening to his equanimity, which seems to consist of equal parts of assertiveness and submission, ferocity and humility: "Plume was dining at the restaurant when the head waiter came up to him, looked at him severely, and said to him in a low and mysterious voice: 'What you have there on your plate is not on the menu'" *(SW* 83). Soon, within two pages, Plume is in the hands of the Secret Police, where the scene closes, unresolved. Sketches like this, in their brevity and dark humor, reminded me, I think, of the powerful comic "skits" or "bits" by Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, W. C. Fields—funny and grave, classically "American," maybe, in the debunking mode. For a graduate student in literature, Michaux was refreshing, heady escapism. I needed *personal* stimulation to counterbalance incipient "professionalism."

So the last thing on my mind was studying Michaux. I'm certain I did not think much at all about his IDEAS. But the force and assurance of his prose suggested a mastery of materials that I found admirable and special. When I went looking for more, though, all I could find was a used copy of Sylvia Beach's translation of *A Barbarian in Asia* (New Directions, 1949 & 1986). It was wonderful, too, and differently, a personal-memoir travelogue rather than the psycho-mythical ones in *Selected Writings*. I devoured it, and banged on the table for the next course. No response from the staff. Evidently, when it came to translated Michaux, the meal was over. In a move that still strikes me as surprisingly intelligent and impractical, I decided to learn to read French, for real, once and for all. Then I went to France, got some brand new Michaux books (and some other things), came home, and began reading them as intensively as I could. Now, twenty-some years later, I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments on two recent Michaux translations as well as on the prospects for any contemporary no-French readers who may, perhaps through these two new books, fall under his spell.

Meidosems is a very pretty book. Yes, I have a few quibbles, reservations, *caveats,* mainly about Professor Jackson's translation, but I

want to make clear at the outset how secondary they are, for me, to the pleasure I derive from seeing in English a complete Michaux text elegantly interlaced with his own lithographs, precisely as designed by Michaux himself, and as published by René Bertelé in a limited edition in 1948. Michaux was 49 at the time, a considerable, notoriously unaffiliated, force in French letters, having published six major books before the war and two more since the Liberation. And while his reputation and production as a writer would grow steadily in succeeding years, his identity as an eminent visual artist in various media was yet to emerge as of the late '40s. True, he had been painting since the early '30s, having had his first exhibition at the Librarie de la Pleiade in Paris in 1937, and he had included drawings and reproductions of paintings in three small earlier books *(Peintures,* 1939; *Arbres des tropiques,* 1942; and *Peintures et dessins,* 1946). For *Meidosems,* however, Michaux produced the lithographs (a new medium for him) and the text concurrently, according to Jackson, in an experimental effort to fully integrate visual and linguistic ideas. The thirteen lithographs that appeared in the original edition, along with five "previously unknown preliminary litho designs" Jackson and Moving Parts include in an appendix, do appear to be portraits of the creatures the text presents in words. Which is not to say, I think, that the two kinds of portraits quite "correspond," but that's another subject.

Moving Parts Press has selected Michaux's *Meidosems* as the introductory volume "in a series of publications which interpret the original French *livres d'artiste* for contemporary audiences," the aim being the closest possible reproduction of the look and feel of "a small number of illustrated texts by celebrated author/artists. . .[such as] Kandinsky's *Klänge* and Matisse's *Jazz.* "While this is certainly an admirable project, and *Meidosems* a great choice for the inaugural volume, I'm having trouble bringing to mind candidates for later volumes written by authors of Michaux's stature. In other words, unless I'm mistaken, *Meidosems* is incomparable, unique. Its lithographs are especially interesting because they signal a new direction in the work of a visual artist whose pieces hang in the Guggenheim and Musée National, and the text is especially interesting because it surely reflects a new point of departure in the work of a world-class poet. For the last 35 years of his life, Michaux's career reveals an unprecedented double mastery, and for a serious would-be interpreter of any work by Michaux, this fact is no mere curiosity. It poses large, thorny aesthetic questions, and *Meidosems,* produced almost immediately after his wife's tragic death—he never remarried—is at the fulcrum. Previously he was a writer who had grown progressively more interested in painting and drawing; thereafter, he would be a writer AND a visual artist, perhaps more precisely (excepting the hallucinogen books *Misérable Miracle,* 1956 & 1972 and *L'infini turbulent,* 1957 & 1978), a writer OR a visual artist.

Dauntingly, then, *Meidosems* is a key to two different doors marked "Henri Michaux." Those wishing to visit him, though, are likely to possess either sharp eyes OR good ears, not both. I, for one, feel a powerful reluctance to write about the visual work, and my inadequacy does not stem solely from lack of training in the critical vocabulary appropriate to painting or drawing. I just haven't seen enough of the pieces. I don't live in that "world." As things stand in the world of literary commerce, I feel lucky to have a considerable number of his texts. In David Ball's *Darkness Moves,* for example, 29 beautifully reproduced paintings and drawings hold center stage, but without accompanying critical discussion, even as to the media, and although some helpful ideas about Michaux's art crop up in the editor's "Introduction," his main focus, understandably, is the anthology's vast textual offering. A reader can hardly quite object.

I want to return later to the general critical issues raised by Michaux's double mastery, but right now I want to explain how I think it might have affected Elizabeth Jackson's work on *Meidosems.*

Since she herself is a literary critic and historian, with published work on Péret, Proust, Valéry, Char, and Chénier to her credit, my guess is that Michaux's lithographs were a challenge to her perspective. She must have felt she needed help, and she got it. She must have known, too, that any Anglo-American reader picking up this Moving Parts edition would be much more familiar with Michaux the writer than Michaux the artist. In an effort to bridge the gap, her sixteen-page "Preface" makes much of how the presence of the plates *affects* the text. No doubt Michaux's juxtaposition of text and art in *Meidosems* does "raise the interesting question of what can be communicated visually and what can be communicated verbally," but she cannot really answer this question without knowing a great deal more about Michaux or about the visual arts, so her remarks come off sounding facile—"The two media do indeed mutually 'correspond' and 'correlate.' Thus, for its creator the work indeed combined, integrally in its conception and presentation, both the verbal and the visual media" (But, like, how?)—or maddeningly obscure, as if effusiveness alone would clear things up—"Accordingly, the difference between the two forms of expression in this case would have to do not so much with content, or even with the nature of the creative process, but with the ultimate effect which is experienced conformably with the message" (Hmmmm). She knows that readers who have heard of Michaux are bound to think of him as primarily a poet, and she would like to rectify that impression. Good. Even if she can't quite say how the pictures work with the text, her intentions are in the right place. But then, carried away with the admittedly mysterious significance of the graphic arts in Michaux's repertoire, her corrective efforts zoom off into error.

". . .Starting in the early fifties, Michaux began to paint more and write less." Leaving aside dates of actual composition (out of ignorance), I'd say the bibliographic record shows at least twice as many new Michaux books after 1949 as since 1927. In other words, he painted more and wrote as much or more, and rarely, only exceptionally, with graphic accompaniment. *Meidosems* is an important experiment for Michaux, and for anyone studying him, because, I believe, it failed. Jackson herself quotes a pregnant remark from *Peinture* (1939): "When one starts painting. . .the word machine (word-thoughts, word-images, word-emotions) disappears." Yes, and in *Meidosems* the depicted and the verbalized creatures seem worlds apart, utterly different kinds of beings, mysteriously (to each other?) bearing the same designation: meidosems. The graphic images seem to be ghostly observers of their companion "text-thing," mute, alien skeptics regarding the flimsy, bodiless word-creature ("We've heard so much about it, but it's not very impressive, is it?"). Reading the text, one finds that the meidosems interact and express themselves primarily through gestures and rhythm (important words in Michaux). They do not talk. They are, in fact, much more like painters and draughtsmen than "authors." In Michaux's post-*Meidosems* writing, as his artistic career is taking off in another realm, far fewer creatures, fantastic voyages, or primarily pictorial writing than in *My Properties* (1930), *The Far-off Inside* (1938), or even *A Certain Plume* (1931), not to mention *Voyage to Great Garaban* (1936). The writing becomes more analytical, even "scientific," the narrator and his subjects, if still eccentric, much more consistently Michaux himself and his interests. The writer talks; elsewhere, the painter makes pictures. As he suggests about his left and right arms in *Bras cassé* (1971), they do not know of each other. In *Meidosems,* too, worlds do not touch, interact; unity is a distant dream abandoned, out of reach. The 70 individual poems sparkle or writhe alone; torments abound, whimsical chance being one of them. The narrator watches the spectacle from a distance; his feelings peek out; they too are swept away; he is powerless, ineffectual. In the end, *"Silence. Envols." Meidosems,* in French, is a very interesting book, a dark and misty, turbulent/unsettling one. It is not a happy book.

For some reason, though, perhaps because Michaux had written travelogues and "fantastic voyages" in the past, Jackson uses the template of fiction rather than poetry to consider *Meidosems*. But he really *did* go to Ecuador and Asia, and he never came closer to fiction than a parody of it in any of his earlier narratives. Nevertheless, words like "story," "narrative," "itinerary," "adventures," and "fiction" pervade the "Preface" and, evidently, I'm afraid, the technique of the translator as well. She admits to altering Michaux's syntax by stiffening up or clarifying caesuras he left marked with commas, ambiguously, in her effort to provide in the English "more structurally logical hints." But whose structure, whose logic, do her

alterations reflect? She speaks of the "conversational tone" of Michaux's prose, but her English diction, when combined with her syntactical changes, makes the writing less easygoing and familiar, more formal and sometimes archaic, than the original. Overall, however, I am most worried by her tendency to add "personality" to a text depicting disembodiment, to provide agency where Michaux supplies arbitrarily shifting apparitions, maybe, after all, just to make the poetry a better "story." I'll give a few examples:

—on page 31, "sentent..de l'élargissement" makes no reference to "an expanding *force,"* nor are this idea and this grammatical form(*-ment)* uncommon in Michaux.
—on page 42: "Et qu'est-ce qui t'a brûlé ainsi, *noiraud?"* does not warrant "poor little blackie," notwithstanding the familiar address.
—on page 33, Michaux has "Il faut fuir. Il le faut. Vite," where Jackson obliterates the ironic pun on flee/flight *(envol)* and adds ideas: "Run for safety. It's urgent. Quick," perhaps to add drama and personality. But the text is expressive, not blunted by "characters."
—on page 36, "le visage qui *porte* des chaines" has become a face "bound" in chains, an interpolation that implies an external agent, and draws attention to the agency and away from the more pregnant and unexplained image of a face just *having* them, about which one might profitably wonder how *is* that so rather than how it might have *happened* (drama).
—on page 71, Michaux writes "signes du vaste agrandissement qui va le liberer comme le sombre peut liberer." Jackson: "signs of the vast *space* which will free him as gloom *can well do."* Now Michaux didn't have to mention *liberer* twice, so he must have had a good reason to do so. Even if I didn't know that freedom and constraints were perennial themes in his work, I would leave the double reference. And as for "space," well, "aggrandissement" is an event, and space is just. . .where astronauts go.
—finally, on page 74, "Ils ont abouti ici. Il n'y a rien a ajouter" becomes "They have ended up here. That is all there is to say." But "there is nothing to be added" is a much more interesting statement. It would be about the meisodems, not just the narrator's disposition toward them. And it is a negative statement, like the original. It retains the general idea of accretions and, by extension, deficiencies, and sufficiency, which correlate with the book's theme—desire. Besides,

> "nothing to add" includes the idea of "saying" without the word "say" being drawn into the text where Michaux didn't put it.

Now, I understand that translation is painstaking, frustrating, unrewarding work, the potential for error, 100%. Oddly, it takes intelligence, experience, and wit to stay out of the original text's way. It may be, as David Ball says in his "Translator's Note," that Michaux "translates relatively easily," but I have found it hard to feel comfortable giving the author the reins until I have discerned for myself the harmony of the entire work in hand, the comprehensive judiciousness of even his smallest linguistic gestures. Only total immersion works—no preconceptions. Some of the problems I've outlined above undoubtedly stem from Jackson's insufficient familiarity with Michaux's other books, but I believe some stem from her chosen metaphor of a fictional travel narrative. If, as a classroom teacher of French language and literature, or as an admirer of Michaux, Jackson wishes to theorize that the author of *Meidosems* saw himself as a "reporter" covering the "story" of the inhabitants of "Meidosem land," one who "sympathizes with their sorrows and their joys. . .their deepest aspirations," for readers who, "after beholding a series of perilous adventures," are rewarded with a "happy ending to [the] tale," no great harm may be done. As a translator of Michaux's text itself, though, the metaphor can get in the way. Too often, Jackson translates as if she wished Michaux had written a different sort of book, one more cumulatively dramatic, one with a more sentimental disposition and tone, one more clearly implying a consistent separation, and paternal relations, between subject and object, voice and vision, one less disturbing, less paradoxical, more familiarly, dependably "literary" in its intentions.

Indeed, Michaux may be easy to translate in some respects. Because he did not write in French until his mid-teens, in school, and thus remained an "outsider" to the centuries-old tradition of Cartesian, literary French, it must have seemed to him, as it would to any Anglo trying to acquire it, as much an opponent of his thoughts as a natural vehicle for them. So he and his translators are, in a way, in the same boat. Nevertheless, there are surely major pitfalls, primarily aesthetic and psychological ones, I think. It *may* be extremely critical for a translator to understand where precisely Michaux's graphic work is aimed in order to locate and maintain, in an English version, the focus of his art in any verbal work. As I've suggested above, his double mastery can make a translator uneasy, as if a shadowy meidosem were peeking over one's shoulder; it will surely take some interpreters of special talents to extricate us readers and artists from "Michaux's Revenge"—his elusiveness. Just when you think you've got him, you look across the room and he's over there, on the wall.

For all that, though, the psychological pitfalls are probably more serious, because they affect all who encounter Michaux's writing, in French or English, and thus can diminish the breadth of his appeal. I know I was struck, after having read a good handful of his books, by the fact that I did not feel much "closer" to him; we did not appear to be getting intimate. And I know it took me a long time to embrace such a reserved relationship with an author I liked. With most writers one reads deeply in, a point of accommodation is reached, a "comfort zone" of sorts, wherein a reader can luxuriate in the security of predicting the next offering, the pleasurable certainty that the next new text one picks up will provide additional building blocks for the foundation of your growing "relationship." From authors one loves, one expects, well, companionship (reading being such a lonely business). But Michaux, even as "Henri," makes a less than perfect *copain.* It took a while, as I've said, for me to understand that he was bringing me a new literary pleasure—disorientation, but without disorder. Even in individual sentences, it's often impossible to feel "grounded." Much rereading before moving on to the next. They are, for a would-be devotee, maddeningly unpredictable, forbidding.

For a Westerner (as François Trotet suggests in his 1992 Albin Michel study *Henry Michaux, ou la sagesse du Vide),* Michaux's leaps are as vertiginously alien as the concepts of Oriental philosophy. For a reader at home, content, in a traditional, parochial, mainstream Occidental culture, Michaux's "attacking" style, and his tactics of irresolution, will likely seem cranky and arbitrary by turns. Only to a painfully disaffected cosmopolitan "outsider" will his exuberant, strident, humorous disaffiliation feel reassuring and apt. It exhibits a life purposefully untrammeled, liberated through devoted, meticulous work, tearing apart the baggage that language, any language, imposes on experience and feeling.

So one is misled to expect from him a comfortable, permanent "Michaux-house" to hide in. The polysemous verbal worlds he fashions and destroys before one's eyes not only provide no dependable footholds, they also suggest the beauty and fruitfulness of a life without underpinnings, without a past, as if one really had escaped, as if that made perfect sense. In fact, while reading Michaux, one experiences over and over the enduring reality of liberty, forgetting while engaged with his pages that one often wishes to be tied down, even by constraints our spirits and minds cannot consciously abide. It is conscious liberty his writing evokes, and that's a paradox, meaning we must reject it on intellectual grounds while it has its way with us aesthetically and emotionally.

What I have come gradually to appreciate through Michaux's writing—and I want to say, self-indulgently, that it has enriched my life—is the peremptory suddenness and surprising propriety of vicissitudes. Like the abrupt shifts of perspective and the unexpected formal mutations in

Michaux's poetry, life *strikes*, and its blows produce life, as if daily events were strokes of my own imagination, like words that just magically appear, unsought, unpremeditated, apt, in conversation. Sometimes. Other times, none.

I do not know why I had long thought that books and their authors should serve as a kind of rest-home for me, where I could live unperturbed and content. I guess I could blame my mother. But reading Michaux's "confetti palaces" has cured me of at least this form of puerile sentimentality. I am not happy with Michaux, and that's edifying.

So I have to wonder if *Meidosems* could be much enjoyed as a reader's first experience of Michaux. The so-called "monster narratives," while no doubt canonical Michaux, are rather enigmatic out of context. As a single piece, it does not so much misrepresent Michaux as it leaves him concealed, not that he would mind. Jackson and Moving Parts' edition is intended as a faithful, even reverent, facsimile of Bertelé's 1948 original, so a more comprehensive, contextualizing critical introduction would have been rightly judged out of place and destructive of the simplicity and elegance of the book's design. As it stands, and it's no small achievement, *Meidosems* provides for an Anglo-American audience an invaluable, telling sample of Michaux's work the way he intended it to be seen by what he had good reason to assume would be his very small audience. It's a beautiful and important little book, now in English, with the French text tucked away in back, condensed to 27 pages. Any Michaux-lover would be delighted to possess it, even at $24.95.

But is it reasonable to expect, for one with a taste for authentic Michaux, that some day, when his reputation has risen to a level warranted by his talent, one will be able to order up (on the Internet, of course) whichever original-format Michaux translations one needs for a complete set? Ideal, perhaps, but unlikely. There are many, many to do.

A more probable scenario, if unfortunately still less than likely, would provide for the Anglo-American audience what the French now possess—a set of anthology volumes containing related small- to medium-sized works, some having been previously published separately in art-book editions (mainly by Fata Morgana, in Montpellier), many being republished, revised and not, from earlier Gallimard anthology volumes, some appearing for the first time in book form, having originally been published in magazines. Between 1978 and 1986, for example, Gallimard reissued at least sixteen Michaux collections, to be set alongside their earlier revised and expanded edition of *Selected Writings (L'Espace du dedans)* (1966) and their new *Selected Poems of Henri Michaux* (1976). No doubt there will be continued posthumous publishing activity as well. The 280-page collection *Affrontements* (Gallimard, 1986), for example, takes its title from a 70-page 1981 Fata Morgana book, the text of which is now included in the anthology

along with nine other pieces, three of which were likewise Fata Morgana plaquettes, issued between 1972 and 1980. Only one piece, a one-page 1983 verse poem, is appearing in print for the first time; the four remaining pieces had appeared in magazines. It appears, then, that the juggernaut French publisher has canonized its solitary Belgian immigrant-son and intends to keep a dozen or so collections, plus a handful of other single-work Michaux titles, in print as long as his European reputation and the resultant sales do not taper off. Theoretically, then, Anglo-American readers should expect to see translations of these various reissues and compilations cropping up on their local book store shelves over the next decade or so. While more likely than a sudden outpouring of Michaux's plaquettes in translation, this scenario seems to me scarcely less a long shot, which brings me to David Ball and The University of California Press' *Darkness Moves: An Henri Michaux Anthology, 1927-1984,* a point, as Michaux might have said, of promise and of peril, of vistas and the abyss.

As an introduction to Michaux's writing, it is vastly more comprehensive and, to my ear, closer to Michaux's idiom and prose style than Richard Ellmann's *Selected Writings of Henri Michaux* (1968), reprinted a few years ago by New Directions. Though *DM* provides no true bibliography of Michaux's work, Ball translates, presents, and contextualizes excerpts from 31 different Michaux titles, in the chronological order of their appearance in the revised Gallimard collections. So, all in all, making use of his extensive notes and his acute introductory remarks, an English reader gets a pretty workable picture of a truly rather bewildering publishing history. And although the erudite Professor Ellmann's 17 pages of introductory material are still entertaining and would be helpful to readers new to Michaux, *DM* is a work of real scholarship that will serve to lead English readers unerringly into the important channels of Michaux's life and work. One gets a taste, for the first time in a single volume in English, of the magnitude, coherence, and variety of Michaux's literary career, one that spanned over 50 active years. I want to add, too, that it is a big (342 pages), handsome, well designed book, in 11/16 Perpetua, such that the text looks honored and uncrowded on the 7 x 10 inch pages—very easy on the eyes, and inviting. A bargain at $30.00—imagine what it would cost had the French texts been included!

Nevertheless, I guess I have to ask, does this ambitious, successful anthology project get us Anglos any closer to seeing complete translations of Gallimard's Michaux collections? Regretably not, I think, unless Ball's extraordinary work produces a clamoring demand for more of this wonderful elliptical prose. Who would these putative "customers" be, and where have they been hiding since Ellmann's 1968 translations? In the meantime, it's true, a few small, complete individual pieces have appeared in English (in descending order of length, the *Constantines' Déplacements,*

Dégagements, 1993, from Bloodstone Books; Randolph Hough's *By Surprise,* 1987, from Hanuman Books; Gustaf Sobin's *Ideograms in China,* 1984, from New Directions; and two pieces here in *Sulfur:* Richard Sieburth's *Of Language and Writing and the Desire to Turn from Them,* #18, and my own *Beginnings,* #34), and I can imagine that *DM* might stimulate a few more such ventures. But—I cannot emphasize this strongly enough—the variety and volume of the Michaux *oeuvre* that remain to be put into English are daunting, a fact that is unlikely to come across quite clearly, except to a Michaux fanatic, even after a thorough perusal of Mr. Ball's book.

In his "Translator's Note," he explains his editing of individual pieces:

> The choice of texts has been largely determined by personal preference (mine and, wherever possible, Michaux's). . . .Cuts in some of the works are indicated by. . ., or, for longer cuts, (. . .);

Now this is a very interesting issue, that of Michaux's favorite pieces among his own works; unfortunately, Ball gives no indication of his sources for Michaux's preferences, or any clear indication that I can find in his introductory or footnote comments as to which pieces are those the author preferred. As for selecting works for inclusion Ball himself especially liked, nothing could make more sense, but, once again, one would like to know which ones these are, since he brought the subject up. I wonder, though, if he does not mean to suggest that he edited out some segments of some works because he did not care for those parts of the work rather than, say, for reasons of mere economy. Surely Ball knows which deletions are which, in his own mind, and it would be fun to hear his thoughts. The "cut" or "long cut" indicators, though, present issues beyond simple curiosity. I see some, but not enough, and where I do find them, I am still not told clearly what ratio prevails between the excerpt and the original. In the case of "Portrait of the Meidosems" (the Gallimard-collection title), for example, although he notes in his brief introduction to the piece that the original is "lengthy,. . .more than 150 pages," the only ellipses that appear in Ball's five pages of excerpts are those employed by Michaux himself. No marks for extended cuts appear. The 1948 original, we know from Jackson's book, contains 70 separate prose poems ranging in length from one to twenty lines; *DM* provides 21 of these, but one cannot know, based on the presentation, which ones were intended to be read adjacent to which. The order is right, but over two thirds are missing. Likewise, in his six-page excerpts from the "Slices of Knowledge" section of *Face aux verrous* (1954 & 1980), no long-cut ellipses appear, although the English reader's loaf is only 32 slices while the French loaf consists of 188. One long-cut ellipsis

stands at the opening of Mr. Ball's three-page selection from *Ways of Sleepers, Ways of Wakers* (1969 & 1978), even though the original runs to over 200 pages (around 80 manuscript pages), and even though the section he presents is from the book's opening chapter, he provides no ellipsis at the end. Needless to say, based on the tiny fragment of it that appears in *DM*, with no editorial comment to suggest otherwise, this piece, Michaux's only book on dreams (no less logical a subject for him, I'd say, than the effects of hallucinogens) looks negligible. I don't think it is. In fact, I love it. Maybe Ball hates it. I don't know.

I could go on in this vein. So could anyone who has access to a handful of the French editions Mr. Ball worked from. But to what end, you may ask? Regarding Michaux in English, here's the outcome I'd like to see.

Comparing Ellmann's *Selected writings* with Ball's *DM*, leaving aside the merits of the two translations and the empty fact that Ellmann was working with a now-superseded edition of Michaux's early works, one sees in the former an admirable effort to produce complete collections and unabridged pieces as arranged by Gallimard and Michaux. For work as diverse and subtle as Michaux's, a premium should be placed on the integrity of the individual works that make up the new collections and on the telling relations that emerge, in reading through the collection, *between* the works now appearing under a single title, especially since Michaux himself had a hand in their presentation, and since one can be assured that little explanation of his intentions is likely to crop up in his as yet unpublished papers. He loathed editorializing. Ideally, then, a single translator should work on each of the new collections. Alternatively, it appears that an individual translator, provided with enough supplementary Michaux reading, could safely apply her talents to one or more of the several individual titles appearing in any collection, according to her taste, with other translators handling the rest. But the translation of excerpts—selecting passages of a work and translating only those passages—is a daring act and a questionable precedent.

A cursory look at *DM* suggests to a reader unfamiliar with the originals that Mr. Ball has excerpted from his own complete translations of the 31 individual works represented in his anthology. And for all I know for sure, he did. If so, it's a prodigious feat, an unparalleled virtuoso literary performance, years and years and years worth. If not, well, it's still a wonderfully helpful, sparkling anthology, especially in its bibliographic correlations depicting the author's unusual career, and if it stimulates some Anglo-American publishers to take an adventurous next step toward Michaux, I hope only that one of the recent Gallimard collections, in its entirety, is their objective.

For me, nothing could be more marvelous than to see all the individual titles that were originally published separately reappear separately as well,

with the French text included (for the new generation of Anglo Francophiles to pore over). And why not in facsimile editions, as Moving Parts and Jackson have done with *Meidosems*, while we're dreaming? I know I couldn't afford them all, though, so my decision to learn French is still paying off.

—JAMES WANLESS

Mark Weiss, *Fieldnotes* (San Diego: Junction Press, 1995)

In "Artifacts: 40 Poems," the major portion of this book, the ground is never steady. There is the sense at every moment that the poet's attention may turn, to incorporate the unexpected detail, the wayward reflection, and thus transform our reading of the whole. By drawing on a variety of poetic techniques, Weiss grants none sovereignty: discernible in the mix are an Objectivist-like precision for registering the external world, a receptivity to chance events, occasional intimate confessions, nuanced repetitions, even snippets of nature poetry. Rather, these are works of assemblage, of delicate tensions and juxtapositions, the disparate parts ringing sympathetically.

To consider the poems as artifacts implies a process of discovery, unearthing not only manmade objects but hidden connections—less to the past, in this case, than between self and world as negotiated through language. The rhythm of the interval rules here, the possibility that the poem may find new openings with each breath, as in the first part of 'XI': "To become transparent.// A hand becomes a slap.// But the lamb is dead regardless." This progression is echoed in the third part of that poem by a more subjective instance: "On the subway/ soft breast against my chest./ Look bored so as not to frighten her." These openings, Weiss suggests, are all about us but they must be approached with care, for an excess of purpose may easily blind us to them. In 'III' he indicates a method of sorts, not for where to go but for how to proceed:

Reach out to the detail
so as not to get lost. So,
maps on the table-cloth.
This place, too,
could be a juncture.

It is the junctures he seeks with these poems, that space in which the wonder occurs, the small or large shifts in perspective. He is less interested in completion, in arriving at a crystallization of meaning, and will counter such a tendency by reaching far outside, often with a subversive humor. The end of a poem, therefore, serves as another point of departure, though it may also leave the reader perplexed. Here is 'IX' in full:

Just before spring
and the ghosts of trees on the Palisades.

Driving across the shadows of bare branches.

Through the shadows of bare branches.

All these things that should never have happened.

"Charlotte is the mother because,
she tells the others, she is wearing the silver shoes."

Fieldnotes is Weiss' first book of poems in nineteen years. Where the 'artifacts' are spare and composed, the two long poems that precede them sprawl with an impassioned notetaking, as so many fragments arranged in a series. Yet both sorts of writing share a comparable array of techniques, including their use of intervals. The long poems place more emphasis on movement through space and on the quality of witness—"Solo," on one level, is about a solo journey by car cross-country—but alongside the 'artifacts' they suggest that these two ways of envisioning the poem spring from the same gestures.

—JASON WEISS

Paper Dance: 55 Latino Poets, edited by Víctor Hernández Cruz, Leroy V. Quintana and Virgil Suarez, New York: Persea Books, 1995.
El poeta y la ciudad: Nueva York y los escritores hispanos, by Dionisio Cañas, Madrid: Cátedra Crítica y estudios literarios, 1994.

In a winsome gesture of travel-brochure enticement, editors Víctor Hernández Cruz, Leroy V. Quintana and Virgil Suarez sign off their two-page introduction to *Paper Dance: 55 Latino Poets:* "Plunge in at any place, get to know the poet, his or her poetry, read everything, feel the rhythms and the beats of this wonderful world of Latino and Latina poetry. Whether or not there is communication is the job of the reader, whoever you are out there, craving good poetry. You."

If it weren't for the unabashed exoticism that went into the title and packaging of *Paper Dance*, I might have ignored the foregoing rhetoric as an innocuous ploy, and of no account. The cover photograph, however, freezes the impassive glance of a child, slightly out-of-focus as she scurries past the shutter; behind her, a graffiti-covered wall-mural of a Caribbean *mulata* with arms upraised and hips *en meneo;* the layout, composed of an overall banana-yellow background, features the collection's coy title swirling above in a rumba-red brush font, and the subtitle boxed in a fidgety urban scrawl. (Equation: inner city = the poetry of *pachanga*.)

So much for marketing. The selected poems in *Paper Dance* were not only chosen, we are told, for their "original breath and composition, but because they speak directly of bicultural experience (. . .) positioned precisely at the center of blending, conflicting, melting of cultures endlessly transforming." Conspicuously absent, though, is any discussion or readerly context as to how the writing produced by such heterogeneous individuals, hypothetically gathered to represent an array of extremely diverse groups—Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban-American, Guatemalan, Dominican, native New Mexican—can in any way be considered together without forfeiting the cultural complexity of each specific narrative, without effacing the differences between immigrant and first-generation experiences of acculturation or transculturation, and without falling into the binary opposition of Latino versus Anglo—presumably that "whoever you are out there" the editors and publishers seem so resolved to seduce in their presentation.

"The poems focus on and are unified by the following themes and perspectives: the 'Americanization' process [. . .]; the use of cultural myths; language and memory; gender; religion and spirituality; rural versus urban (the Barrio) life; ideals and values; the role of Latino and Latina poets; the

questions of universality and specificity." Potentially the stuff of a compelling poetics and one which, if taken to its formal limits, might have genuinely yielded examples of a contemplated radicality: a writing where border-crossing and displaced identities are expressed in disruptive languages; a poetry that claims the recognition of meaning, but in a speech that in no way lends itself to accommodation; new inflections between the pauses of a conversation to which some voices are welcome, but nonetheless uninvited; the anxiety and ambivalence of representing personal, cultural or historical narratives, avoiding pre-constructed essences, modalities and effects, so as to re-invent certain processes of resistance; a form of signifying where "the pure products of (the) America(s) go crazy."

But to the very real imperative of questioning and re-thinking the social/artistic status of what is clearly a historically-original and commanding Hispanic presence in the United States—one which in time will serve to establish cultural, if not political and economic re-negotiations within the hemisphere—*Paper Dance* serves up the following bit of imagist demagoguery: "It is the history of our nation, singing here through personal experience, a lyrical montage that is also a bridging of the private to the communal. The tropical *guayaba* growing out of snow-covered cement."

Certainly, *Paper Dance* is just another symptom of a now widespread situation in publishing and university-department policy, whereby the crucial debates surrounding cultural, racial, sexual and generic "identities" have rapidly met with suppressive uses and their predictable side effects. In territorial battles over who-gets-to-represent-whom, crisis-modernity's analysis of cultural difference has given rise to a common middle ground: an official version of diversity, with unrestricted license to self-expression—always provided it entail, of course, a subject addressing his/her experience as related to the topics and surface reflections of complex collective realities that are bound to be oversimplified.

This is often legitimated by, and sheltered under, the theoretical architecture of certain discourses in cultural criticism where, in a typically condescending fashion, phenomena of this kind can be dubbed "marginalized performative agency." As I understand it, "rendered experience"—especially as it pertains to the possibilities of poetry—should at best be considered in the Foucauldian sense of a subject involved in active invention, employing all forms of knowledge and direct interactions with visible and invisible powers (canons, traditions, legacies), so as to forge renewed artifices in which a self can be publicly engaged.

The general mode of utterance in *Paper Dance,* however, oscillates between the elegies of a nostalgic I as it embarks on the prosaic enterprise of establishing an organized, recognizable belonging via the clichéd motifs of cultural specificity: "an occasional Spanish word here or there"; the

theme of family coherence, or the lack thereof ["It's all about grandmothers / with big floppy ears, / and coughing grandfathers, / with jello stomachs laughing."]; ironic or bittersweet local description [For years afterward, the boy marveled at an island / where the people drank Coca-Cola / and sang jingles from Word War II / in a language they did not speak"]; extemporaneous, pseudo-political statement ["the lover of a subversive / is also a subversive"]; a kind of *riqueza-y-mundo-interior*-sentimentality with a familiar finish aimed to exonerate the well-intentioned reader. Hence, substance here can reach baffling heights of triviality:

> I don't think Mother believed me when I first said
> it had not been me who left teeth prints
> on the cream cheese Tío Berto got through la bolsa negra.
>
> (Sandra M. Castillo,
> "Abuelo Leopoldo Sneaks A Bite of Cream Cheese")

Consider the following takes on such vital matters as, for example, class:

> It would be years
> before I took the courses that would change my mind
> in schools paid for by sugar from the fields around us,
> years before I could begin to comprehend
> how one does not see the maids when they pass by....
>
> (Julia Alvarez, "Homecoming")

racial issues:

> All my uncles on my mother's side have looked
> like Omar Sharif at one time or another
>
> (Dionisio D. Martínez, "Variations on Omar Sharif")

cultural miscegenation:

> I'd love to be cynical.
> I'd love to make fun
> of my Cuban American angst,
> of my ethnic tragicomedy.
> Baby boomer and Yuca
> Cubiche, Yuckie *con mojo*.
>
> (Elías Miguel Muñoz, "Repetitions")

political figures:

> Norberto told los bones
> about Fidel
> and how he has to admire his cojones
> and the way he blows his smoke
> in the face of opposition
> and how you can hate a man's guts
> and still see his worth
>
> (Magdalena Gómez,
> "It Happens While Presidents Play Golf")

or, worse yet, an imagination still haunted by the sexuality of colonialism:

> His chest hairs swirled on her syrupy **mameyes,**
> her lips became slices of **guayaba,**
> and only American tourists order **papaya**
> instead of "bomb fruit" before blushing waitresses.
> Hunger and the corner café would make him come fast.
> (. . .)
> he would go well beyond the fondlings
> with which he had seasoned her like a ham (. . .)
>
> (Ricardo Pau-Llosa, "Mulata")

There is of course—and to be fair—work that stands out above the frippery: that of Adrian Castro, "Pulling the Muse From the Drum"; Lorna Dee Cervantes, "Blue Full Moon in Witch"; Víctor Hernández Cruz, "Time Zones"; Ray González, "The Recurring Dream of the Snake..."; Daniel del Valle Hernández, "The Structure of a Dream"; Juan Felipe Herrera, "The Sea During Springtime"; Gean Moreno, the youngest poet in the collection at 22, "Amantes sin tiempo"; Pedro Pietri, "The First Rock and Roll Song of 1970"; and Gloria Vando, "New York City Mira Mira Blues."

Even among the notables, however, what amazes me is a general diffidence. In *Paper Dance* you can't help but notice the blatant paucity of an archetypal imagination, foundational epic-gestures, collage techniques, documentary strategies, accidents of speech or historical revisioning to forge a calculated musicality or to test an improvised harmonics; in short, the registers and scope made available by modern and postmodern poetic practice in both Spanish and English.

In last year's *El poeta y la ciudad: Nueva York y los poetas hispanos,* Dionisio Cañas perhaps inadvertently points to larger questions as to what

a "Latino tradition" in the United States might also include. In his study, the author chronicles a reverse side of modernity's exoticism by following the important work written in Manhattan by José Martí (the groundbreaking "Versos libres"), Federico García Lorca (*Poeta en Nueva York*, still awaiting a persuasive English translation) and Puerto Rican poet/short-story writer Manuel Ramos Otero (who died of AIDS in 1990). In the process, Cañas manages to gauge the transitions from symbolist *modernismo* to the international avant-garde and postmodern re-positioning, and the bibliography offers a list of over fifty Latin-American poets who, in recent decades have lived and worked in New York City—to speak of only one domain in the US.

To "bridge" a poetics between avant-garde practice in the United States and Latin America would naturally involve a massive project of cultural, writerly translation on both sides of the language barrier. Given the present climate in the States, however—of which *Paper Dance* is paradigmatic—it remains unlikely that a representative anthology of twentieth-century Latin American poetry is bound to see publication within the immediate future. (Of the fifty-five presumably Spanish-literate writers included in *Paper Dance*, only two list translation credits in their biographical notes.)

The evidence seems to indicate that most cultural institutions today (both the university and publishing industries) will continue favoring a minor art selected as exemplary and isolated so as to maintain strict patterns of standardization. Hispanic resonance within a larger discourse between the Americas will largely depend on how successfully Latino writers negotiate the various available legacies of modernist writing in at least English and Spanish—not passively inherited, but rather actively reinvented—and by employing a politically mindful poetics to radicalize our variable experiences of difference: in a language formally bursting with that otherness it lays claim to represent.

—ROBERTO TEJADA

A Fox Occult Among the Grapes
Heavenly Tree Soluble Forest by Gerrit Lansing, 1995, Talisman Publishers, 129 Wayne St., Jersey City, NJ 07302

The universe is an everyday companion.
—A.E. [George Russell],
The Avatars

rrit L singu logetic esoteric particularities, foregoing
freeze-dried canons and squabbling advocates.
letter al rol
One of the great and disarming values which the publication of this book performs is a rearticulation of the shape and boundaries of "influence"
nd all along to have been, an *operative*—
a ose spa Glouc w Yor
jectiv eep im e
ere as holographic opportunist, flexing the implicate order of *The aximu Measur*
sterior xpress
's mplic not at Monopoly game called "Influence,"
bu t rganizatio f sense in time.
olytempo e horta ions Id an lumi hout *Heave*
Soluble For his herm
furn cor
nor mind sposed
solations ecause of such beautiful resistances *H av nly Tr Solubl For st* uminous apparitions of poetry's American time.

Heavenly Tree Soluble Forest is "Hermetic, terrible from joy" (9). buoyantly sympathetic with the rhythms of enchantment, but importantly resistant to the image snares of that "social web commodious/ where mystified mystery hides / in starspangled gleams of beautified credit" (150). A tactic is spelled out in the "Burden of Set" editorials (1961 and 1963)1: "'image is deficiency,'

as the Gnostics say, & any typology of poetic 'Image' gets hung up on the line of similarity, comparison. (Insofar as 'image' is referential it means a leak in the vessel, which should be Hermetically sealed for the cooking . . .)" (BS 85). Here, swiftly, the proviso is condensed: "as it beckons, simile, a chronic door" (182). The caloric concern, for both alchemists and cooks, is "how to manage the heat" (BS 85). Lansing disposes his work in the Aion, that larger appetite of time which nonetheless averts (everts?) the Platonism of "eternity"; so in the *Set* editorial he diagnoses our time as "the most difficult transition age of all, a real Interchange of Tinctures, where a kind of personal life is being exchanged for a kind of 'universal'" (BS 90). "Poetry falls on an age of undoing like *nothing known before,* & rite measure & metric flow from the crystal of the Moment" (BS 84). But Lansing cautions against construing this as either a doctrine of "personism" or "composition by hazard"—abjuring at once O'Hara and Mac Low, who at the time marked two boundaries of radical poetics. He also resisted the "deep image" of Robert Kelly (whose Matter press first issued *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward),* insisting on the degradation of image, image as cultural (cult-sure) pollutant. So he offers a critique of the dollar-bound sign (as it "grows ghostly, self-reflecting, craving craving craving endlessly"), proposing in its stead: "Theory of value in itself must then imply an economic scrutiny, how an image differs from a thing" (BS 89). In the poems of *Heavenly Tree* images abound, but they twist and dissipate as *prima materia* always about to be gobbled up by the macropotentials of syntactic bliss and magical obedience.

This body of poetry is steeped in practice, in a *practicum* which is esoteric or out of sight to the uninitiated. Glimpses appear here and there: "His right hand takes the left-hand path, the Sign / is born and flowers in the sudden damp" (44); "Have you opened your head to the dead? / Do they puddle there, wire your voice box?" (46); "I swallowed the personal key. / It has dissolved" (142); "The bird can take off, at any time. It brings news from nowhere to nowhere" (212). However, the esoteric work is now helpfully arranged in this volume for exoteric access, principally by an arrangement which highlights recognizable domains: gNature (to use the term from the second "Burden of Set" [BS 91]), sex, and epistemology of mind. All three converge in the most demanding of esoteric stipulations: "All use is abuse. The word of the Aeon" (47). And: "A god is of the nature of the slime" (175).

The sexual implications, explications, and evocations elaborate the scenario, "vivifying red disruption all around, / ambush in the Easter egg"[2] (139):

Love emerges from the filth of love:
Girls strike matches in the buried kitchens of their mothers;
Boys in bed machine the book of wheat until it sings to fly.
(34)

All I want is loving you and blank-blank blank-blank blank-
[blank.
It's only unmentionable because there's no end to chasing it
the tale of it and you and sustenance.
(29)

When in Rome do as the Greeks,
show it hard,
let intellect be rampant in the flagrant colors of the indomi-
[tably so,
no compromise no blame.
(40)

This constant surge of ardor in which "The company of love. . .Acclaim the throbbing animal" (12l)—this sexual compulsion "to make the world splash in our heads" (104) as "the gusher of spirit exults" (26)—is the inverted or esoteric dimension of the canopic dome of the outside, the starcap, the planetary cape or pelt that shivers responsive to our sexual shudders. José Lezama Lima names as a paradox of poetry that *"love is not made caressingly from pore to pore, but from pore to star. . ."*[3] As "the solar heart defines the blood / How far out you go / it is within" (171). "Shamash and Tammuz together in the shade. Their fingers touch. / The stars are hot in the branches of their tree" (149). "The fixed stars have to shoot up abilities day by day / to go on gliding on golden rails of appetence" (177). Sexual exaltation fringes converging tracks of the planets. "Sex on earth is rhymed angelic motion" (170). Angelic instruction as foreplay:

Express yourself
the angel said

exhaust yourself
and so the stain uniquely gives consent
(60)

It is also a vegetal motion, or notion, this sexual terrestrial paradise, nicely rendered in the doubly focal figure of human lover and rose: "I remember rose hips, a body writhing as it spent itself" (89). So the sexual dimension is initiation, and the esoteric is not so intimidating after all. Sex as

prolegomenon to magical apparition. "Do you want to shine / softly / in the beam of forms? / But handle the stone" (103)

The gnosis of sexual wisdom necessarily extends to "gNature," that land of pre*gn*ation, of *gn*owing as boding where "Life sucks itself to life in Granny Day's swamp" (75), where "The god of this world treads on brains like grapes" (91).[4] This nature is a haunt of rudiments. The hermetic labor here is to discern the interpenetrations, the mutual absorbency of revelation in "thrust and consummation of the tiger's spring and orange presages of fall" (17), or "seeing the whole jewel-net flicker in the depths of the sea" (84). In the reciprocal endowments of high and low, inner and outer, the sex that seemed confined to animal nature gnourishes a howling consonant dissonance or dissonant consonance, perennial flex of *the same difference:*

> in my garden, Erasmus Darwin said, blooms
> bright surprise galore on bright surprise
> and from their volant passion splurge cataracts of eyes.
>
> (153)

The newly baptized title, *Heavenly Tree Soluble Forest,* adds a dimension previously withheld from the occult binarism of *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward.* The shift appears to have come in Lansing's recognition that the Curriculum of the Soul pamphlet *Analytical Psychology* was in fact the text ("The Soluble Forest" now) meant to conduct the book to its solutions, where "always is never because" as "under the moon / the swimming forest dissolves" (213). It's as if the previous incarnation, enacting the demanding logic-magic "Time is (the) Number 2" in the "Burden of Set," were here discovered as a Peircian semiosis: "From the center of nothing something spreads out, that then there now. From zero jumps two, two being how something is apprehended" (196). (In Peirce: "The nothing of negation is the nothing of death, which comes *second* to, or after, everything."[5]) From heavenly tree to soluble forest, the ritual inversion is complemented and so completed: "The house stands on its cellar and grows up. Also grows down from its garret invisibly, as the crown of a tree flourishes the idea of its root. . . All around us the letters are cast, to be spelt, to be sown like spelt, grain of the garment unseen as green as it makes it" (196).

With this Lansing convenes as a final tableaux the epistemology of mind, the "statute, fable, / rock of what imprints us in the shakes of being where we are" (75). Emerson speaks of "the indefeasible persistency of the individual to be himself. . . .Every mind is different; the more it is unfolded, the more pronounced is that difference." Much of this epistemological difference is in place already with the sexual code and the natural garden plot: the gnosis "that our knowledge / exceeds our having minds" (172).

The enigma of identity is contingent on this unrecuperative if pleasurably excessive expenditure. "The rapture of itself it views / And how it needs to seem to be" (9); "joy trapezes in its animals. / Mind and mindlessness are one" (33). If sex is syntactic respiration of the planet, mind is semantic evaporation of nature's coagulates. To become is to be undone. But the tonic or tincture differently disposes in the newly composed; to be lost is also *to found:*

> so I am always finding in feeling
> locating in shifting
> the terms that compose me
> the rhetorical cinnabar lode
> whose clavicle's wavicle's key
>
> (201)

In his second "Burden of Set" editorial (1963), Lansing proposed the figure of the double-axe or labrys as a Janus-like bifurcation of "the figures of Time that compose the structure of our necessity, how by poetry we investigate the needs" (BS 87). He uses the term "figure" as a subtle correction of the oculocentrism of "image" and as a way of evoking the incalculable calculus of no-mind: "in exopsychology," he remarks, "the messenger substance / figures as figure" (202). To write is to writhe, coming and going convened like Whitman's hermaphroditically open road (the congenial genius of a genital *tao)* in which (and for those for whom) "supraliminal language-field is body-field" (200): "A WRIT is a route, a way and the map of a way. It figures and we make of it our figure, you make of it your figure, I make it of mine. It is mind, and no mind, inner and dinner and outer and doubter" (196).

The quicksilver lubrication of a precipitous syntax—its changes and exchanges—requires "traction" ("The Burden of Set" is Lansing's Tractatus on traction, to which the poems stand as extracted contractions.) Traction, it seems to me, is behind the magical principle of contrariety. "To be useless is not without use" begins "In the Grip of the Octopus" (49). "The breath of Set," Lansing says of the Egyptian deity of malevolence, "dessicates to freshen" (BS 85). To go by contraries is to affirm by inversion, to be ceaselessly becoming the understudy of oneself. The visions are fleeting and alarming:

> Ain't pleasant to work at the compost,
> but the niches are empty,
> and the eye will terribly blaze from the triangle

when the lion god
at last
steps forth by day.

(158)

A man cannot be but enters in some folly:
if he is saved the direction of the savor is the god who blind as
Orphics say and dumb is still the Chariot
we ride in every day
or drown.

(175)

I couldn't make out the form that gestured as the door swung to,
a man with the head of a weasel possibly,
and I shot back into the steaming morning air
fulvescent from the fubbery which wasn't any more than what we
cast about us every day

(180)

So often in Lansing's work there is a weird momentum spun out in sudden shifts of register from colloquialism to arcana; antiquarian diction unaccountably seized with the plain sense of things; a surge from strophe to catastrophe. Lansing's poetry is narcotically regnant with a lush American gothic spunk of ectoplasm. Yet these phantom sensations are themselves adrift in an ambience demanding "precision and soul" (to cite Musil's lovely terms), since the cadence and even the focus may change from line to line. This sounds like collage, but if so, it's collage that one could only intend by deliberate acts of autotransgression, where the estrangement that is language is ever a dweller on the threshold. As John Wieners wrote, prefacing *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward* in 1966, "The obtuse is clarity."

Lansing's way of keeping time is by releasing time, not unlike the pianism of Monk or Janácek. It's the inner quiver, *Stimmung* in German, that resonates outer circumstance in a meaningful reminder of what time is all about. Approvingly citing van der Leeuw's "myth creates time" in the *Set* editorial, Lansing distinguishes two takes: investigating history, and investigating "the dark interiors" (BS 83). Intimacy is intricacy. In our time, "prophecy [is] self-confrontation & the magic of inwardness [is] hidden in the autonomy of the visible, the uses of secrecy obscured, hard to come by" (BS 85). Lansing has worked at that compost for a long time now,

discerning in the principle that "Value is of the excrementitious nature of Time" (BS 90) that the truly secret is not the Fort/Da yo-yo; the hidden not a bashful reluctance to appear. The open sewer of our cultural traffic in images forfeits any sense of hermetic retention. "It remains to be seen what cannot be permitted" (BS 92): and it remains to be thought how this sounding pronouncement from "The Burden of Set" insists.

* * *

A concluding word on the state of the text is called for, given that two prior editions were published in 1966 and 1977, and in view of the shoddy condition of this one.[7] There were twenty-four poems in the first (mimeo) edition, three of which were subsequently dropped. Twenty-two poems (seventy pages) are added, and six short poems deleted, from the second rendition.[8] The considerable expansion has resulted in a notable interior mutation, as seven sections have become eleven; and, most notably, the poems themselves have been entirely reordered. The new order reveals an essential feature of Lansing's working method: the poems are fractal and faceted, so the permutations are considerable, even imponderable. *Heavenly Tree* has gone through its nigredo and the furnace is now a workshop-cavern-solar bubble with a man inside the outside, and many intricate veins for the reader to burrow out through from within.

1 "The Burden of Set," reprinted in *Caterpillar* 10 (January 1970), 82–93. References in the text will be abbreviated as "BS".

2 A gnostic interpolation: "All life long / you include something /that includes your life. / You are in the egg" (13).

3 Lezama Lima, *"Orbita* Interview," tr. James Irby, *Sulfur* 24 (1989), p. 175.

4 "Whoever looks at the insect world, at flies, aphids, gnats and innumerable parasites, and even at the infant mammals, must have remarked the extreme content they take in suction, which constitutes the main business of their life. If we go into a library or newsroom, we see the same function on a higher plane, performed with like ardor, with equal impatience of interruption, indicating the sweetness of the act." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Letters and Social Aims* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1875), p. 177.

5 Charles Sanders Peirce, "Objective Logic," *Collected Papers, Volume VI: Scientific Metaphysics* ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 148.

6 R.W. Emerson, op cit., pp. 200–201.

7 The sensual palpability of the poems seems oddly distorted in the generic budget press format given here. Talisman has done an undeniable service in publishing *Heavenly Tree,* but even so it's a sloppy job. The table of contents lacks page numbers, for one thing; the order of the poems is scrambled in two instances; and one of the poems listed ("The Pursuit" in section 6) is not in the book at all. There is a crucial misprint in "The Bereft" (89): the line "It is sufficient to vanish never" *should read* "It is sufficient suffering to vanish never"; "nomarchs of the mirror" should be *monarchs* (23); the poem "A Comfort in the Longing Flames" should not end with a comma (64). Such glitches make me wonder whether "Olana" has lost its memorable subtitle ("or, The Shark of Craving" as it appeared in *Sulfur* #1) by design or by misadventure.

8 The new poems are, in order of appearance: "The Milk of the Stars from Her Paps," "From Under the Mat Where Sat the Cat," "The Glory of Changes," "Tea at Slinky's Palazzo," "Bracketing in City Thickets," "3 Poems of the Underworld(s)," "In the Grip of the Octopus," "A Far Memory of Lazy Spring," "Hands That Melt Like Snow," "History," "Alba," "Sunset as Early Warning System," "Furiously Framing," "Elegiac Fantasy, Delayed in Glass," "The Recluse (fragment)," "3 Anecdotes of the Uncanny," "From the Orchards of Sleep," "Equinoctiall," "Olana," "In Erasmus Darwin's Generous Light," "When Locality Falls," and "The Soluble Forest." Most of these poems have appeared in small magazines during the past fifteen years, and the culminating twenty page section, "The Soluble Forest," was originally published as the Curriculum of the Soul pamphlet *Analytic Psychology*. The deleted poems are "The Green Bottle," "A Simple Fire of Wood," "A Drink," "Portrait of a Poetaster," "Habits," and "Neglect Not the Dawn Meditation" from the 1977 edition. Dropped from the 1966 text (i.e. not in 1977) were "Rumors," "Prose for St. Catherine's Day," and "The Euonymous Poem."

—JED RASULA

Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton **by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 1995). 754 pp.**
Alcools: Poems by Guillaume Apollinaire. **Translated by Donald Revell (Hanover, New Hampshire and London: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1995). 171 pp.**

For the past several years English translations of André Breton's important texts have been appearing fast and furiously, and considering the fifty years that have elapsed between the publication in our language of the first book of his work (the 1946 *Young Cherry Trees Secured Against Hares*, a slim selection of poems), and the thirty years that mark his death in 1966, it's high time for the massive consideration accorded him in Mark Polizzotti's superb biography. The numbers, indeed, are propitious—a fact that Breton probably would have enjoyed: despite the 1995 publication date of *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*, 1996 also marks the centennial of Breton's birth. Since he shifted the date of his own birth from

February 19, 1896, to February 18, I've given myself permission to juggle the figures a little, too.

Indeed, one hopes that Polizzotti's scrupulously researched and highly readable work of biography and scholarship will serve to do just what such a study ought to do—send interested readers and writers back to the books to get the full picture, since by the end of this century just about every major text of Breton should be available in our language. His life and work offer the possibility of the endless reevaluation and rediscovery that make the study of literature the inexhaustible mine that it is. And there are still two more volumes to come (two having already been published) in Gallimard's Pléiade edition of the *Oeuvres complètes,* an extraordinary series whose notes and citations open up Breton's often knotty work to further scrutiny and understanding. And the other important figures who surrounded him (or, as some will argue, dwarfed him) in the Surrealist adventure—Soupault, Aragon, Éluard, Desnos, Péret, Artaud, Tzara, to name only a few—should also demand the attention of readers and translators, since Polizzotti offers vivid portraits of them side by side with their acknowledged (and sometimes repudiated) leader. The biography also raises questions about the writer's life, and about the Surrealist experiment as a whole, some of which I hope to touch on here.

Polizzotti's biography goes a long way towards humanizing the formidable Breton, whose glaring gaze in book photographs can still elicit snap-judgments about his character. What one finds here, surprisingly, is that Breton was not always the pillar of steel that his persona and pronouncements suggested. Most of the time Breton seemed to be an unhappy man, waiting around for the next lightning bolt that would galvanize him into action, and in these pages the image that is shaped of him is not entirely sympathetic. The first critical fact that Polizzotti presents to us is Breton's lifelong antagonism toward the cold-hearted mother who bore this only child, who refused him the society of other children, and who relentlessly policed him as a teenager, even requiring the young student of medicine to study his textbooks *out loud* so that she could prevent him from reading the poetry that he had begun to love in his high school years. (The father, Louis, worked as an accountant for the police in his native Lorient, then for a glassblowing firm in the Pantin suburb of Paris, where Breton was raised. Surprisingly, Breton returned home virtually every summer of his life, and retained cordial relations with his father until the latter's death.)

In light of what we learn in these pages about Marguerite Le Gouguès Breton, one aspect of Breton's—hence Surrealism's—search for "the" woman, be it the Nadja of his 1928 book or the three wives and many lovers that constellated his emotional life, seems to have been compensatory: the denying mother had to be replaced by females who were malleable enough

to please him, but who could be banished with a wave of the hand when their "mystery" vanished into disappointing flesh and blood; or who retained his interest by resisting him, like Lise Deharme, an early fixation, and Suzanne Muzard, with whom Breton carried on a stormy romance and saluted in "Free Union," perhaps the best known Surrealist poem). Enter the "child-woman" (of whom the famous Nadja is the type, and of whom Polizzotti has much to tell us). Unlike the mother, the child-woman is unpredictable and therefore a dynamic source of excitement; because of her youth, she is to a degree forbidden; in other ways, she can be controlled, rendered dependent, as the real mother cannot be. The extreme youth of many of Breton's attachments give us some index of the immaturity of his own feeling life.

When no woman was in Breton's life (or when one of them, like Lise or Suzanne, was making him miserable), his reaction was to tighten his controls on the Surrealist group, leading to the well-known, even infamous "purges" that characterized his leadership of the movement, as if he suddenly assumed the guise of the icy anima, the loveless disciplinarian who devours her children. The mother-issue opens into the Surrealists' treatment of women in general, wives, artists, and writers included, which Polizzotti handles with sensitivity and skill. For example, the portrait of Simone Kahn, Breton's first wife, with whom he seems to have worked out a kind of "open marriage," was a beautiful, perceptive, and tolerant partner whose importance to Breton and to Surrealism is not to be underestimated.

Another important theme (we could call this the "father motif") focuses on Breton's mentors, beginning with Paul Valéry, whom the young man idolized, courted, and ultimately replaced with Apollinaire, though he too was finally deemed insufficient when his enthusiasm for France and the war became too much for his young disciples to bear. (That Breton continued to use Valéry and Apollinaire long after his heart had vacated the friendships does not go unnoticed by Polizzotti; in the same way, Breton could always rely on his supportive father, who left him a considerable inheritance.) The austere poet Pierre Reverdy is here, too, who frightened away Breton, Aragon, and Soupault with his crusty personality and cranky pronouncements, yet of whom Breton made great (and acknowledged) use to shape his own domineering persona and his theories of the Surrealist image, which bore fruit in writing practice in the *First Surrealist Manifesto* (1924). Yet all of these heroes were to some extent swept away by the arrival of Jacques Vaché, whom Breton, a medical attaché during the war, encountered in the hospital where the dandified, cynical soldier recovered from wounds. Polizzotti carefully tracks the brief friendship that meant "everything" to Breton, and which ended abruptly with Vaché's death (accident or suicide?) from opium-eating. His contempt for literature, for the war, and for women accented Breton's behavior from then on, even to

the point where he grafted much of Vaché's sensibility onto himself. "By disappearing under intentionally mysterious circumstances," Polizzotti writes, "Vaché bought himself the first sepulcher in what would become the Surrealist pantheon." Given the pathetic nihilism of Vaché, how willing are we today to lay wreaths upon his grave? As with Lautréamont, another suicide, how much are we willing to live out of this kind of self-destructive anger, for it was a kind of universal fury that fueled the Surrealist enterprise as much as Surrealism sought to purge itself of its hate of everything handed to it by its fathers and mothers.

Another major issue that Polizzotti handles with great care and detail is the slow but steady journey of Breton and his companions towards radical politics. Having seized control of a magazine that they renamed *Littérature* (the title was a gesture of contempt), Breton, Soupault, and Aragon got their first real taste of power. After the deaths of Apollinaire and Vaché, and primed by an interest in Socialism that stemmed from their high school years, it was nevertheless the coming of Dada, especially in the long-awaited arrival in Paris of Tristan Tzara and in the alliance with painter-poet Francis Picabia, that created a bridge to the real world for these young writers. Dada yanked them out of whatever cubicles remained in ivory towers that the war had not demolished. Conceived as an attack on bourgeois values and sparked by the presence of the manic Tzara, who reveled in discord for its own sake, the Dada manifestations put these young men in front of hundreds of paying patrons in halls and theaters across Paris, finally shoving them face-to-face with "the people," who of course laughed uproariously at the side-show spectacle. While Breton and Aragon's first attempt, in 1920, to join the Communist Party would be rebuffed, he and the others inched forward, trying time and again to gain the good graces of the Comrades. The slow engagement in political action was one way of saying no to the hermetically sealed older generation of Symbolist poets. Indeed, activism seemed inevitable for Breton and his generation after the war, if they needed to feel that they had some stake in shaping (or at least thumbing their noses at) a world which had almost destroyed them. Maybe too the Surrealists turned to politics because they understood, if only on an unconscious level, the inefficacy of their poetry and art when it came to creating change in any realm but the artistic sphere. The double-think here, remember, is that the Surrealist position rejected "literature" as an honorable enterprise at the same time that Breton and others lived off the sales of paintings purchased from friends or given to them for critical services rendered. Poetry that lacked a popular appeal and eschewed an ethical responsibility had to be compensated by a politics that resolved to change the world, and this is exactly where the Surrealists got stuck, for they had neither the numbers (the French group may have boasted sixty members at its apogee) nor the commitment to lay down their

pens and dirty their hands. The twenty-year sparring match between the young men who felt that they had a vision of their own to contribute to Marxism and the intransigent party hacks reads like a comic opera played on a seesaw. Party heavies neither understood nor cared about Lautréamont and automatic writing, and when Breton (in his fifteen minutes as a Party member) was assigned to a section of the Paris gas workers union, the hopelessness of the affair reached its nadir. Breton, who loathed "work" and only intermittently held patronage jobs at the Gallimard publishing house or as collector and literary commentator for wealthy dress-designer Jacques Doucet, was ill-equipped to understand what it meant to punch in every day, seven days a week, fifty weeks a year. The system of wealth and connections that for the most part sustained him (albeit mostly in semi-impoverished conditions) was exactly what he and his comrades were supposed to be working to destroy. The hunt for the "marvelous" in everyday life, at least as practiced by Breton and company, posited the kind of leisure time that very few modern writers and artists have ever had at their disposal, not to mention working-class people. Those who could not follow the program, and the wives and families of those who did, suffered at the hands of the "visionaries." Writers like Robert Desnos, whom Breton saluted in the first Manifesto as one who "has fully justified the hope I placed and Surrealism," but who practiced journalism to eat, were expelled. Reading about the "pure" life that Breton and some of his confreres aspired to, one can't but be reminded that William Carlos Williams managed to raise two sons, support a wife, and still work full-time at the doctor's trade, all while he wrote a shelf full of books.

This leads to one of the thorniest issues of modernism, particularly Surrealism, in which the personal unconscious was pried open and its products distributed, sometimes wholesale, as art. What about the relationship of the kind of prose and poetry that Breton and his comrades produced in relation to the needs of ordinary people, even intelligent people? There's no doubt, and nothing new in the fact, as far as art movements go, that Surrealism was an elitist coterie; and there's no doubt that the movement produced extraordinary work. Is it the lot of the artist to cheat on bourgeois society, to become in fact a parasite, sucking at the belly of the beast in order to survive? How are we sustained today, and for what purpose are we sustained, by this work? Breton is a difficult writer to read by anyone's estimation; is that what we are to settle for? Or does the artist have a larger responsibility to make himself or herself comprehensible, one that modernists have played fast and loose with for a long, long time? (Most artists don't really want to face these issues, it seems to me; and anyone who raises them is immediately accused of being an enemy of the avant-garde.) Else, the fate that Breton most feared, to end up as "mere literature," to fall

into the dark and bottomless briefcases of the professors, where all the tenured jobs are swimming around.

Finally, *Revolution of the Mind* raises the issue of the "search for the marvelous" itself. What was Breton and his group looking for in the streets, in their dreams, and in the automatic texts that they produced? Certainly "to change life," to liberate themselves from the ego-ridden behavior that riddled their enterprise even as they sought ego-dissolution in collective action and creation. They sought liberty, they sought love, they sought heightened states of being through chance operations (the visits to the flea markets, the hypnotic sleeps, the exquisite corpse parlor games) that would restore them to a childhood purity, to the Garden of Eden that had long failed them as a reference point. They sought a wholeness that the century of the two wars and endless political strife and poverty conspired to tear to pieces. Though Breton dabbled in astrology and magic (and his engagement with the works of the hermeticist Eliphas Lévi, one of the cornerstones of Anna Balakian's important study of Breton published in 1971, which Polizzotti makes little use of), he was soundly, and I think rightly, criticized by René Daumal for exhibiting the lack of a wider consciousness in the latter's "Open Letter to André Breton" in 1930. I quote from Mark Polizzotti's translation of the essay, which appeared in his 1992 collection of Daumal essays, *The Powers of the Word*:

> And in the area of positive research, what have you done since the founding of Surrealism? What have you done, surrounded by certain individuals whose presence at your side never ceases to amaze us? Nine-tenths of those who claim or have claimed the title of "Surrealist" have done no more than apply a technique you discovered. As such, they have only managed to create clichés that render it unusable. So that now I should go to you to indulge in your little parlor games, in those pathetic and piddling experiments with what you so inappropriately call the "surreal"? For such entertaining discoveries as the "exquisite corpse" and automatic writing (alone or in groups), I should leave the whole technical apparatus that the *Grand Jeu* [Daumal's group] is working to build, and to which each of us brings his share of resources! We have, in answer to your *amusing science*, the study of all the processes of depersonalization, of telepathy, of clairvoyance, of mediumism; we have the unlimited field (in every conceivable mental direction) of Hindu yoga, the systematic confrontation of the lyrical and dreamlike fact with the teachings of occult tradition (but *to hell* with the *picturesque*

in magic), and those of the so-called primitive mind . . . and we're not finished yet.

What is most disturbing about this very important book is that it too practices the refusal that was made by Breton and his generation, who swept away any metaphysical perspective on the Surrealist enterprise with the same hand that reached out for the "marvelous." That hand had to be satisfied with occasional *frissons* rather than the rewards that might have come from a sustained, disciplined quest. Reading Polizzotti's superb account of the composition of *The Magnetic Fields* by Breton and Philippe Soupault in 1919, on the verge of the transition from Dada to Surrealism, gives me the chills:

> As Breton had feared, his "dangerous book" was beginning to take its toll, particularly as the speed of writing increased. "Despite everything, we could not continue," he confessed. "And hallucinations lay in wait. I don't believe I'm exaggerating when I say that it couldn't go on any longer." He later said that automatic writing worked on [him and Soupault] "very much as drugs do." At the end of the allotted eight days, fearing for his mental stability, Breton hastily terminated the experiment.

A methodology that leads to madness, to the destruction of spirit rather than to the discovery and deepening of the transpersonal, is no method at all—witness Lautréamont, witness Rimbaud, witness Vaché. What Breton and Soupault were probing was the personal unconscious, fraught with all the paranoia and fear that waits to leap out at us if we have no wider perspective. The experience of the "marvelous" is transitory; it is not the experience of awe that comes with the realization of the sacred. What do we do with this Surrealism that long ago, as Robert Desnos insisted, has passed into the public domain?

Before turning to Donald Revell's new translation of *Alcools*, let me note that my name appears among those of many people offered thanks by Mark Polizzotti in his Acknowledgments, and that some of my and Zack Rogow's translations of Breton's poems (*Earthlight*) are referred to, sometimes quoted, and sometimes altered by Polizzotti. No money changed hands. And all I did to earn the author's gracious thanks was to tell him, a long time ago, when he pondered the project of this biography: "Do it. Nobody can do it better than you will." I'm glad I did.

What should Apollinaire's Al*cools* be called in English? It's always struck me as strange that the title of what may be "the" modernist volume

of French poetry continues to defy translation. Perhaps by now it's almost too late to give the book any other title than *Alcools,* which can't mean a lot to the audience for whom it is presumably intended: those who don't read French. So it has gone, however, through Anne Hyde Greet's translation (published 1965, and now evidently out of print, since the jacket of the Wesleyan book insists that "this is the only version of this seminal work of French Modernism currently available in the United States"), and William Meredith's (1964) version, not to mention the Ur-volume of Apollinaire translation, Roger Shattuck's 1949-or-so *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire,* published by New Directions, where his selection from the volume also gives the French title.

But we know that *alcool* means "alcohol," the quainter "spirits," and (the Harrap's dictionary tells us) "*U.S.:* hard liquor." A title like *Booze* would be off the mark, and one that I long favored, *Drinks,* maybe isn't much of an improvement. *Alcohols* summons up visions of the rubbing variety (which in the U.S. is also one of the meanings of the French noun), and *Spirits,* alas, is too metaphysical. What about *Hard Stuff?* Nah, too slangy. Maybe we could settle for the neon sign of the package store and call this book *Liquors.* One could do worse. Maybe even *Alcohol* would serve, if it wasn't for that nagging plural. . . . I suppose that Apollinaire was thinking of each of these poems as a drink of hard liquor, some of them short stiff lyrical belts, others fantastic concoctions looped with fruits and drilled by exotic syrups.

Which is to say that the absence of any discussion of this famous book's title constitutes the first strike against Revell's translation. Then, strike two, there are no notes (many of the references in these poems are hardly transparent), and the translator's few pages of introduction don't help much. Finally, strike three you're out, the translations themselves are pretty dreadful, in fact so dreadful that one wonders how this book came to be published in the first place. What we d*on't* need is Revell's misconceived Apollinaire; what we *do* need is a collection of the first-rate Apollinaire translations that poets like Ron Padgett and Michael O'Brien have been doing for years. Revell's work reads like notebook translation (I'm thinking of my own notebooks full of Apollinaire translations): an interesting start, but you know that the final poem-in-English is a million revisions away.

What could have convinced Wesleyan (not to mention Revell) to publish such a poor piece of work? The mere fact that, as of now, "this is the only version of this seminal work of French Modernism currently available in the United States"? Well, a*lmost* available, since Revell has seen fit to cut three poems from the text:

> This translation of the original 1913 Éditions Gallimard *Alcools* is complete, with the exception of three poems: "Merlin et la

vieille Femme," " Le Larron," and "L'Érmite." These exceptions were all composed much earlier than the rest of the collection and do not, I feel, share in its true project and accomplishment. In every other instance, this translation preserves Apollinaire's original order.

Apollinaire's original order is preserved, which perhaps means we should be grateful that the sequence of the poems hasn't been juggled; but his original text has been tampered with. Revell may not feel that these poems "share in [the book's] true project and accomplishment," as he tells us in a prefatory note, but the poet who wrote them evidently did. So, finally, we do not even have what the book jacket claims that we have.

To illustrate what I mean when I say that these translations aren't very good, let me offer the shortest poem in *Alcools* as a specimen case:

Chantre

Et l'unique cordeau des trompettes marines

Revell gives us

Singer

And only one in the world chord ocean horns

The title is fine, but in offering his version of this one line, the translator strains after what can't, in fact, be translated into English. Apollinaire was obviously entranced by the puns: *cordeau* (which means "string") also contains "horn" (even "body," *corps*) "of water." *Trompettes marines* can be translated literally as "sea/ocean trumpets." Hence, "And the only/single water-horn of the ocean trumpets." (Revell's "world" is simply not in the French, and his "chord"—the French word for a musical chord is *accorde*—isn't there, either) What we actually have here, though, is what appears to be a found poem, part of the dictionary definition of the rather strange musical instrument called the trumpet-marine. The trumpet-marine, though, isn't a brass instrument at all; it is a bowed instrument which *has a single string*. So the poem must be translated literally: "And the single string of the trumpets-marine." Admittedly this is not much fun in English, but the jumble of incomprehensibilities that Revell offers to the unsuspecting reader simply won't wash.

One can turn to almost any translation in this book and find much to challenge on the level of accuracy. In that great poem of grief, "À la Santé," written when the poet was held in custody and accused of having stolen

the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre, we find *"Une mouche par le papier à pas menus/ Parcourt mes lignes inégales,"* which Revell renders: "Parsing my words a fly patrols/ The paper I write on." "Parsing" is clever, but *parcourir* means "to travel through, wander, scour; to examine cursorily or glance at something." Revell wants to make the fly a *flic*, a charming idea but not one sustained by a reading of the text. And what happened to *inégales*, which means "uneven," since the poet has had to draw lines on his writing paper, paper presumably supplied to him by the prison? (One can't pick and choose among which words one will translate.) My shot at this passage would read something like: "On the paper with tiny steps a fly/ Wanders my ill-drawn lines." The point here is that even the fly is free, while the poet is in chains.

Examples such as these can be multiplied *ad nauseam*. Though any translation can be picked at, there are too many false steps and omissions for this translation to be honored. What is most inadmissible, though, is the tone of the translation, which presents Apollinaire not as the graceful word-musician that he was, but as an oaf with a tin ear. This Revell knows, and attempts to justify in his introduction:

> At present, under the burden of canons and the burden of language's deep complicity with countless atrocities, the very making of poems requires audacity. And if the audacity is well-intended, it requires a certain awkwardness as proof of its unrehearsed refusal to comply with silence. I have attempted a new translation of *Alcools* because, as a poet and as a reader of poetry, I feel lonely for joy and for the spur of joy. In my task, I have been constantly reminded by the poems themselves that transformation always begins in awkwardness and disproportion. Therefore I chose to distort certain moments of syntax deliberately to reproduce Apollinaire's verbal and thematic strayings. . . . I chose to translate many passages in *Alcools* as "incorrect" mixes of high and low diction, of latinate and slang, of abstracted concretes and concretized abstractions, because it is just such mixes that have made Apollinaire so enabling to our contemporary poets.

This kind of jargon doesn't convince me. Translation may well begin in "awkwardness and disproportion," but it had better well end as something else for it to be worth the effort, or the reading. Revell's rendering of the refrain of *Le Pont Mirabeau* will have to stand as kind of tombstone for the clunkiness of the book's entire soundscape: "The night

is a clock chiming/ The days go by not I." [*"Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure/ Les jours s'en vont je demeure"*]

Perhaps, though, there's a generous tack we can take. Any translation, good or bad, can be *useful*. As it stands, Revell's Apollinaire, still in its workbook stage, could have been a good, even a very good translation if the poet had kept at it longer and harder. Maybe that's why it's been handed to us, the way Apollinaire himself (and his young admirer André Breton) kept themselves open to a sudden piece of inspiration. Perhaps the translator of the next (or first great) version of *Alcools* will receive the necessary jolt to start his or her project after thumbing through Revell's Apollinaire.

—BILL ZAVATSKY

PHARMAKO/POEIA Plant Powers, Poisons, and Herbcraft by Dale Pendell, Foreword by Gary Snyder, Mercury House, SF, 1995

This is a strange, dangerous, and finally wonderful book. The writer,"a poet, software engineer, and longtime student of ethnobotany", leads us along what he calls The Poison Path through a tangled forest of psychoactive power plants, "green allies." He provides us with a "Phenomenological Taxonomy of Psychotropes" to guide us, classifying this vegetal gallimaufry into five categories: Thanatopathia (tasting of death—e.g. tobacco); Inebriantia (relating to drunkeness, e.g. wine, beer, aqua vitae); Euphorica (plants bearing pleasure, e.g. opium); Phantastica (visionary plants, e.g. peyote, yage); Exitantia (provokers and agitators, e.g. coffee, khat, cocaine, speed). (In this volume he deals with the first three, and a few others. In an upcoming volume he will deal with the last two.)

Pendell creates an elaborate mandala to illustrate this, a pentagram that relates each of these categories to a different planet and connects all to all with an elaborate system of pentacles and circles. Throughout the book he gives us tables of correspondences relating the plants to alchemy, the Buddha realm, animals, art forms, bodily parts, historical age, gemstone,

geometry, logical operator, etc. etc. basically what you will or whatever comes to Pendell's fertile and ever active mind. He mixes botanical descriptions with poems and exhortations, quotes from Eddington and Boehme with Zen koans, chemical formulas for extracting alkaloids with quotations in German from Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, instructions on how long to hold in a toke of *Salvia divinorum* with stories of Taoist sages coming down from the mountains.

Pendell revels in the esoteric and the strange, the long Latinate word, Greek quotations and extended etymologies. The book is in the tradition of imaginative scholarship and playful erudition found in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*, medieval and Renaissance miscellanies, Rabelais elaborate spoofs of theology and pedantry, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Sterne's *Slawkenbergius' Tale*, Graves' *The White Goddess*. If you like this sort of thing, and don't take it all too seriously, it is a joy to wander though the text, looking up Greek and Latin references, checking sources, finding "dicotyledonous" and "kavalactone" in the extensive glossary, learning all about about "extraction under reflux" and "thujone, an isomer of camphor found in the essential oils of wormwood, sage, cedar and tansy, one of the major active ingredients of absinthe."

What unifies it all is Pendell's voice: learned, quirky, funny, full of drug lore and stories of whole villages in Europe whacked out on ether, "the streets smelling like hospital rooms." The voice jumps back and forth between sense and non-sense, sandwiching learned philosophical disquistions between goofy rimshots of inspired rant. On ether:

> *The Ally What is the collateral damage of the pharmacist's pipette?*
>
> Occasionally I have an insight that would lead me to despair of any nobility of human nature.
>
> *The difference between the ba-bá and the nothing is significant: there are political implications.*
>
> And that the difference between being and nothingness has political implications is astounding.
>
> *There are those who would repress the question of the difference between the ba-bá and the ba-bá ba-ba-bá as having any significance.*
>
> *ba-bá ba-ba-bá or ba-bá-ba ba-bá*

Since the book is so packed with learning: chemical and alchemical, historical and philosophical, with socio-religio-thaumaturgical drug lore and magical correspondences on virtually every page, it's hard to judge the accuracy of much of what Pendell delivers to us. The scholarly underpinnings are so immense, so universal, that without a knowledge of all of the above and then some, it's hard to decide how seriously to take him.

Well, one area I know a good bit about is Inebriantia (all jokes about Irishmen and the crayture and Pat and Mike and the Bartender insert here . . .): wine, beer, and related categories. I teach about wine, make wine, judge wine professionally, wrote a book about the history of beer, lectured at the Smithsonian about beer, etc., to establish the bona fides. So I went through this section with extra care, checking out all the references, looking carefully over the chemistry and techniques described, doing, in short, a "scholarly" critique. And I couldn't come up with so much as a quibble. All Pendell's sources were impeccable and his information absolutely up to date. So while I certainly can't judge his alchemy or his pharmacological expertise, he's bang on about the booze and a lot more fun to read than many of the "prismatic luminiscence" school of wine writers. Which bodes well for the rest of his information.

Then there's the danger. This book and what it describes could kill you. Pendell opens the way to a Path of Poison that can lead the foolish, the weak, and the uninitiated to disaster. The substances described are, literally, poisons. And many—nicotine, alcohol, heroin, opium—can lead to addiction, overdose, death. Pendell says:

> Our way is the way of poisons. Mercury,
> the poisonous changeling.
>
> Some plants
> like to lap up to you, doglike.
> Others hit you like a mallet.
>
> Once they get in you, they've got you. From then on, the plant-poison is part of you.
> Our way is the way of poison. If you want sacredness, highly evolved consciousness, spiritual magnificence, holiness, sweetness, beauty, and truth,
>
> GOOD!
> Aspiration is halfway-there.
> But our way is the path of poison. The path of sulphur.
>
> *Everything is poison, nothing is poison.*
> *—Paracelsus*

He warns again and again about the dangers and rates the toxicity of various drugs, including alcohol and nicotine, two of the most lethal. He tells us in The Poison Path I:

> "The matter of the *stumbling brother* is the cross of the Poison Path: on this trope turn the intersecting greater and lesser vehicles, the right hand path and the left. Skilled poisoners avoid ruin, but. . .ruin may come on her own wings."

He says, "Never share poisons with the unlucky." But goes on:

> "The danger, of course, is that you who are reading this consider yourself, ipso facto, one of the lucky."

Gary Snyder sums it up in his graceful and wise introduction:

> "This is a book about danger: dangerous knowledge, even more dangerous ignorance, and dangerous temptations by the seductions of addictions both psychic and cellular. It is a book which requires that one not be titillated by romantic ideas of self-destruction. I hope and believe it will benefit human beings and the plant world too. It is not for everyone—but neither is mountaineering."

But finally, this book is full of wonders—a magical journey through the mind of a thaumaturge. Pendell is a member of a clan of visionaries, plant people and seers, who are testing the limits that seem to divide levels of existence. One way to look at these poisons, these drugs that can kill or make us see, is as transmitters between realms of being. If, as some think, we human beings are matter becoming conscious of it (her?) self, then these "vegetal sacraments" are the means by which she comes to know herself. Anyone who has seen sunlight suddenly become a shower of gold coins in an aspen grove after two hits of Humboldt County *sinsemilla*, knows this well. Pendell is telling us that the green world gives us what we need to see. What she gives is dangerous and can lead us to death or madness or the gutter, but there is a path that we can take. Others have, and Pendell brings this whole rowdy visionary company to his pages. Perhaps they can guide and protect us on the way, he says, or at least we can all get loaded on the poison of our choice and have a good time telling stories about gods and heroes and the holy plants.

—DENIS KELLY

Contributor Notes

Readers of the Robin Blaser Section in *Sulfur* 37 may be interested in the Fall 1995 issue of *West Coast Line,* which, among other things, includes more material from the Vancouver Conference honoring Blaser. A copy is $10, and is available at 2027 East Academic Annex, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC V5A 1S6. WILL ALEXANDER has new work forthcoming in *Caliban, Apex of the M,* and *First Intensity.* He will be part of the guest faculty at Naropa, summer 1996. T.J. ANDERSON III lives in Binghamton NY; his chapbook, "At last round up. . ." will be published in the spring of 1996 by Lift Books. STEPHEN BARBER's recent books are *Antonin Artaud: Blows an Bombs,* and *Fragments of the European City.* His text on Guyotat is the result of a number of interviews with the writer conducted in Paris. Sun & Moon will publish CHARLES BERNSTEIN's *Republics of Reality: Poetry 1975–1995* in late 1996, he is host/co-producer of LINEbreak poetry radio (http://wings.buffalo.edulepc). JAYNE CORTEZ is the author of nine books of poetry and producer of six recordings. "Now I dig up patinas" is from her book *Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere,* to be published by High Risk/Serpent's Tail in 1996. IAN DEMSKY is an Ann Arbor high school student taking classes at EMU. Rodent Press in Boulder has recently published CLAYTON ESHLEMAN 's *Nora's Roar.* DAN FEATHERSTON lives in Tucson; recent and forthcoming work in *First Intensity, Talisman,* and *Central Park.* DENNIS FORMENTO is the editor of *Mesechabe: the Journal of Surre(gion)alism;* his most recent publication is a chapbook, *William Faulkner Lives and Dies in Camelot* (BullHead Press). ROBERT HALE lives and works in NYC; his poetry has appeared in *Denver Quarterly, The World,* and *The Impercipient.* LINDSAY HILL's most recent book is *Kill Series* (Arundel). His newly-completed book-length manuscript is entitled *NdjenFerno.* LAIRD HUNT is studying Lettres Modernes at the Sorbonne; he has had work in *Talisman* and *The World.* LISA ISAACSON is teaching English in Ankara, Turkey. DENIS KELLY writes, teaches, and gardens in Oakland CA and on Creighton Ridge in western Sonoma County. KEVIN KILLIAN, born in 1952, lives in San Francisco, and is the author of a novel, *Shy,* and a book of memoirs, *Bedrooms have Windows;* he has recently finished a biography of Jack Spicer, co-written with Lew Ellingham.

WENDY MCCLURE was recently a Teaching-Writing Fellow at the University of Iowa; she is currently at work on a manuscript entitled *Crenellation*. English poet and translator CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON has taught since 1966 in Germanic Languages, University of Texas at Austin; Sheep Meadow Press will publish his *Intimate Chronicles* in 1996. JOE NAPORA publishes BullHead, a journal of new poetry. JOHN OLSON'S poetry has most recently appeared in *Volt, B-City,* and *New American Writing;* an essay about the representation of poets in movies will soon appear in *First Intensity*. JED RASULA's *The American Poetry Wax Museum* was recently published by National Council of Teachers of English; *Imagining Language,* an anthology edited with Steve McCaffery, is forthcoming from MIT Press. PETER REDGROVE and PENELOPE SHUTTLE are poets living in Cornwall, England; they are the authors of *The Wise Wound* and have recently published their *Alchemy for Women*. ELENI SIKELIANOS currently lives in Paris on a 1995 NEA Fellowship in Poetry; she has forthcoming chapbooks from *Lyric &* and *Trembling Ladders* presses. "The Mountain Spirit" is a key section from GARY SNYDER's recently-completed "Mountains & Rivers," which Counterpoint Press will publish in late 1996. A new collection of GUSTAF SOBIN'S poetry, *Breaths' Burials,* has recently been published by New Directions, as has *By The Bias of Sound: Selected Poems 1974-1994* by Talisman House. Recent publications by ROBERTO TEJADA, who lives in Mexico City, include art writings in *Third Text, Boletín de Curare, Luna córnea* and *The Boston Book Review*. ALLEN S. WEISS is most recently author of *Phantasmic Radio* (Duke University Press), and *Mirrors of Infinity: The French Formal Garden and 17th Century Metaphysics* (Princeton Architectural Press). JASON WEISS's writings, both creative and critical, have appeared widely; he lives in Brooklyn. PAMELA WYE is an artist whose work was written up in the January 1996 issue of *Art In America*. BILL ZAVATSKY published his cotranslation of André Breton's *Earthlight* (Sun & Moon Press) in 1993.

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